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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS AT STOU IN THAILAND

by

AURAPAN PORNSIMA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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Abstract

The major purpose of this study is to explore the experience of students in distance learning programs and to examine the value of distance learning programs as perceived by STOU students. To achieve these goals, integration methodologies, a questionnaire survey and an in-depth interview were used.

Questionnaires were distributed to 460 STOU students selected randomly from 1982 registration records in the faculties of Education and Management Science. The target group was limited to those students living in Bangkok or Nakornsawan. The questionnaire contained 25 items dealing with reflections about personal circumstances, educational experiences at STOU, perceptions concerning distance education programs, and suggestions for course improvement.

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted to clarify the questionnaire data and to secure qualitative information which could not be readily accessed through the questionnaire. Thirteen informants were interviewed; five second year students, four first year students, and four dropouts.

An analysis of the questionnaire data and interview accounts revealed these major findings: (1) students attended STOU for personal enrichment, better job opportunities, and STOU degree; (2) STOU student learning experiences were different from those of conventional universities; (3) textbooks were the primary student study

medium at STOU and students perceived textbooks as providing the greatest contribution to their learning. Other media, such as audiotapes, radio programs, TV programs, tutoring sessions, and summer schools were used occasionally and perceived as lesser contributors; (4) students encountered learning hindrances due to the delay in delivery of instructional materials, the inadequacy of counselling services, the poor quality of tutoring sessions, the lack of study time, the lack of motivation and self-discipline, and financial problems; (5) the majority of students perceived that STOU programs were valuable to them; (6) perceived value of the program was related to goals in attending STOU, occupation, and daily-life; and (7) in general, students felt satisfied with the program.

On the basis of these findings, improvements were recommended in the following areas: services provided to STOU students; STOU instructional media; student evaluation; services provided to the community.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Due to rapid progress in technology and education, it is necessary that human beings continually keep themselves up to date. Many people in the contemporary world feel that the schooling they received is insufficient. For these reasons many school leavers seek ways to educate themselves. Unfortunately, many universities place quotas on applicants, limiting accessibility. In addition, students encounter difficulties when forced to adopt the university lifestyle, a way of life that may be unfamiliar to the individual who has not been in the school setting for some time. These factors contribute to a lack of success amongst dropouts who attempt to return to school. In response to these problems, many countries try to find ways to educate school leavers who have no opportunities to attend conventional postsecondary institutions. England seems to be the pioneer in this field by providing educational opportunities to school leavers through the Open University. Woodley (1981:1) points out that there are three environmental factors that have led to the development of the British Open University:

1. A growing demand in the late 1950's to 1960's for access to higher education.
2. The feeling of inadequacy and inequality in educational

opportunities. In 1959, it was found that only a small proportion of English people continued in full-time education in their later teens and that this represented a waste of national resources.

3. The awareness of the potential of broadcasting in education. In 1960, it was found that several TV and radio broadcasting companies or corporations were available and were ready to cooperate in broadcasting educational programs.

These three factors were eminent and caused pressures on the British government to name the Robbins Committee to study the problems of and needs for expansion of higher education. Among many other suggestions, the Robbins Committee proposed (Perry, 1977:4):

> that the universities must expand to meet the increased demand from qualified school leavers, and this expansion was under way. It insisted that places in higher education be made available to all those capable of profiting from them.

Harold Wilson, the leader of the Labour Party, made access to higher education part of his party's platform during the 1963 election campaign. After winning the general election, he named a steering committee to initiate this unconventional university. In 1969, the Open University was found by the Royal Charter as an independent and autonomous institution authorized to confer its own degrees under the following premises (Perry, 1977:1):

1. To provide education to school or postsecondary institution leavers.
2. To employ mass media in educating school leavers.
3. To promote the spread of egalitarianism in education.

In the United States, the idea of adult learning and lifelong education is widely supported by educators, foundations, and governments. Several comments and suggestions concerning lifelong education and adult learning have been publicized. Among others, Luskin's (1979:26) writings are worth pursuing.

> Lifelong learning offers hope. Clearly, education terminated at 18 or 24 is no longer sufficient for a person at age 50. Learning throughout life offers hope to all of us and keeps us from becoming mired in stagnant circumstances... Professional, technical and managerial jobs of all types are now much more knowledge-based than ever before. Increased occupational obsolescence necessitates continuous retraining and upgrading.

In order to cope with dramatic changes in society, adults need to continue making choices between complex and controversial alternatives. Therefore, the need for lifelong learning is obvious. In addition, to live happily in this changing society, Luskin (1979:26) states:

> We must have education for living. With the advent of earlier retirement, shorter working hours, broader interests, communications, and travel, it is clear that education and learning opportunities are important for vital living.

In response to needs for lifelong learning, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) of the United States ordered "that, in 1952, channel assignments be made to 242 communities exclusively for noncommercial educational purposes" (Adams, 1979:17). Also, in order to use mass media in educating school leavers effectively, the Carnegie Commission on educational television recommends that:

1. There should be combined federal, state, and local effort to improve facilities, provide support for individual stations, and increase the number of educational stations.
2. Congress should establish a federally chartered corporation to receive and disburse government and private funds to improve programming.
3. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare should be given funds to improve station facilities, expand the coverage system, and encourage instructional programming.
4. Federal, state, local, and private agencies should support the development of TV as a tool for formal and informal education (Adams, 1979:17).

To date, many government and private organizations have paid attention to the introduction of mass media and technology into the administration of education. Among others, the Miami-Dade Community College has developed telecourses and utilized them successfully in educating college students. Further, the broadcasting of the "Children's Workshop," "Sesame Street," and "Electric Company" is a good example of the successful utilization of mass media in educating school-age children (Zigerell,

1979:6).

In the province of Alberta, the government acknowledged the educational role of mass media by founding an educational radio station, CKUA, in 1927. Its mandate was to facilitate educational experiences for Albertans of all ages through programming which reflected a unique blend of music, culture, and instruction. In 1974, CKUA was absorbed by ACCESS Alberta, as was CARET (the Calgary and Region Educational Television Association), and MEETA (the Metropolitan Edmonton Educational Television Association). The principal role of ACCESS is "complementary to the total education enterprise within the province of Alberta" (Alberta Educational Communications Authority, 1978:2).

While these developments were taking place, the Social Credit government announced the establishment of Athabasca University in Edmonton in June, 1970. Its' original mandate was to provide undergraduate degree programs in higher education (Athabasca University Fact Book, 1982:3). However, after the establishment of the university, two significant events occured: 1) the rate of increase in enrollments at other universities in Alberta dropped sharply and 2) the founding government of this university was defeated by the Conservative government. These two events brought changes to Athabasca University and threatened its' very existence. The building plans and campus site proposed

by the former government were not approved by the Conservative government. Athabasca University therefore proposed its new direction - aiming at fulfilling educational needs of adults through unconventional delivery modes. This new proposal was authorized on condition that Athabasca University conduct a three- five year pilot study. This was (Athabasca University Fact Book, 1982:3):

> ...to demonstrate that the university course could be developed and deliveried to students for home study, and to prove that there were enough Albertans who want and would benefit from this service to make it a worthwhile undertaking.

The proposed report made after its first two years of operation indicated that the unconventional university could provide satisfactory programs and opportunity to its clients. Permanent status as an undergraduate degree granting institution was subsequently granted to Athabasca University in November, 1975. As states in the Athabasca University Fact Book (1982:4), Athabasca University is currently mandated to:

> ... provide higher education opportunities to adults who by choice or circumstance cannot avail themselves of degree-level study at other institutions. Modelled in part after the British Open University and similar institutions, Athabasca University has specialized in delivery modes which facilitate "learning at a distance", involving a variety of media including print, television, radio, and telephone.

In Thailand, the government realized the necessity of postsecondary education for school leavers. Two

universities were found on an open-admission policy (Thammasat University in 1933 and Ramkamhaeng University in 1971). However, due to circumstances of over-enrollment, the two universities could no longer be operated under this policy. Therefore, in September, 1978, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) was declared open (STOU Planning Division, 1981:2). At the initial stage, with two programs offered (education and construction management), there were 82,139 students enrolled in the university (Wichit, 1981:21). In order to cope with the unlimited increase in enrollment perceived for the future, the university employs distance learning techniques to enable students to study at home without having to attend classes as in conventional universities. Three techniques of course presentation have employed the following modes of delivery (STOU Planning Division, 1981:8):

1. Main media: Correspondence texts, textbooks, exercises, TV and radio broadcast handbooks.
2. Supporting media: TV and radio broadcasts , including broadcasting of video tape and course material recorded on tapes and other grammophone records.
3. Tutorial and counseling sessions at various regional and local study centers.

These techniques are new for the Thai students who are familiar with face-to-face learning in classroom situations. Statistics obtained from the Registrar's Office at STOU

indicated that 24.6 per cent of the first term students passed their first term exams. They also show that about 36.4% out of the total student body of 82,139 dropped out of STOU programs after the first term final exam (STOU Enrollment, 1980-1981:2).

These startling statistics suggested that students were encountering difficulties in studying at a distance, and the researcher was intrigued by the unanswered questions. How do the students perceived the value of the program in helping them meet their educational objectives? What unique personal difficulties were they encountering that might adversely affect their performance?

Revisions in the program design and implementation were obviously required, but the researcher felt that no meaningful changes could be implemented until there was a thorough understanding of the environmental factors affecting the progress of STOU students.

For this reason, the researcher designed and conducted a study of STOU students which would provide enough meaningful data to direct program revisions.

In order to understand this study better, one must understand Thai education, the development of the open university in Thailand, the STOU curriculum and instruction, and the STOU evaluation.

Thai Education

The early development of Thai education started in the Sukhothai period (AD 1279-1300), particularly under the reign of RamKamhaeng the Great, who, with his scholars, invented the Thai alphabet in 1283. He used this alphabet in his stone inscription. From Sukhothai stone inscriptions, Thai people know that two types of education were provided during this period: a) education for princes and nobles' sons; b) education for the common people.

Education for princes and nobles' sons was provided by the Royal Institution of Instruction, while education for the common people was conducted in the Buddhist temples, and was also limited to males. Unstructured and quite informal in character, the primary goals of the Buddhist model were to provide moral and religious instruction as well as some practical knowledge related to specific occupations. Subjects taught in the temples included Buddhist religion, language, literature, history, medicine, and the martial arts. Vocational instruction was carried out by the family unit. No school fees were required. Teachers called to their vocation in this tradition were highly respected by their students. Teachers had their own occupation and they pursued education as their interest. Education was a voluntary activity and no remuneration was offered to the teachers by their students.

Very little change was observed during the Ayuthaya period (14th- 17th century). Buddhist temples took responsibilities for educating community members on various subjects, mainly religion and practical arts such as Astronomy, Law, Philosophy, Sculture, Science, and Medicine. All these subjects were taught by Buddhist monks in the Buddhist temple. In the later half of the 17th century, the country started to become exposed to Western influence (Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English) through foreign trade. Especially during the King Narai period when French missionaries founded a missionary school in Ayuthaya city. At the same time the first text- *Chindamani* was written and used to teach Thai people. Consequently, the text helped improve the Thai educational standards and influenced the development of Thai literature. However the Thai educational system remained comparatively unstructured.

The Thai educational system during the early Bangkok period was not much different from that of Ayuthaya period. Religion was the dominant theme being taught in Buddhist temples. Some foreign languages such as Pali, Khmer, and English were taught. This loose structure of the educational system continued till the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1865) when the country was forced to reform its educational system to prepare its citizens to be able to deal with colonization influences of western countries.

King Rama IV restructured the educational pattern to suit the new needs of the nation. English became a tool for acquiring knowledge and for making business and official contacts with westerners. Therefore, English missionaries were hired to teach English to the royal families.

The first modern school was established by King Rama V in 1871. The King sponsored many Thai students to study abroad. These overseas graduates helped the King reform the administrative structure and the educational system of Thailand. As the Thai Elementary School Act was proclaimed the education system became more formal and in 1895, a national education scheme was inaugurated for the first time. Elementary schools all over the country were required to use curriculum and texts developed by the central office in Bangkok. Chulalongkorn University, the first Thai university, was founded in 1916. The main purpose of schools and the university was to train students for office work and the civil service. As a result the majority of Thais have since believed that educational institutions serve the purpose of preparing individuals for positions in government. Among other reformers, Prince Damrongrachanuparp, the first Education Minister, is the most notable Thai educator who brought reforms to the Thai educational system.

In 1932 the structure of the Thai government changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy dominated by the military. After this time, many changes were brought about in the Thai educational system. Several national educational schemes were inaugurated with consideration for individual educational ability, regardless of sex, social backgrounds, or physical conditions. The Thai educational system provided for every citizen the four basic aspects of education: intellectual education, moral education, physical education, and practical education.

However, the methods of teaching and learning were still not much different from the past. Teaching and learning were conducted in the classroom under the control of the instructor who was the primary source of information. There was very little participation on the part of students and virtually no classroom interaction occurred among students or between teachers and students.

To help the reader better understand the present structure of Thai education, the new national education scheme is presented on page 13 (Figure 1).

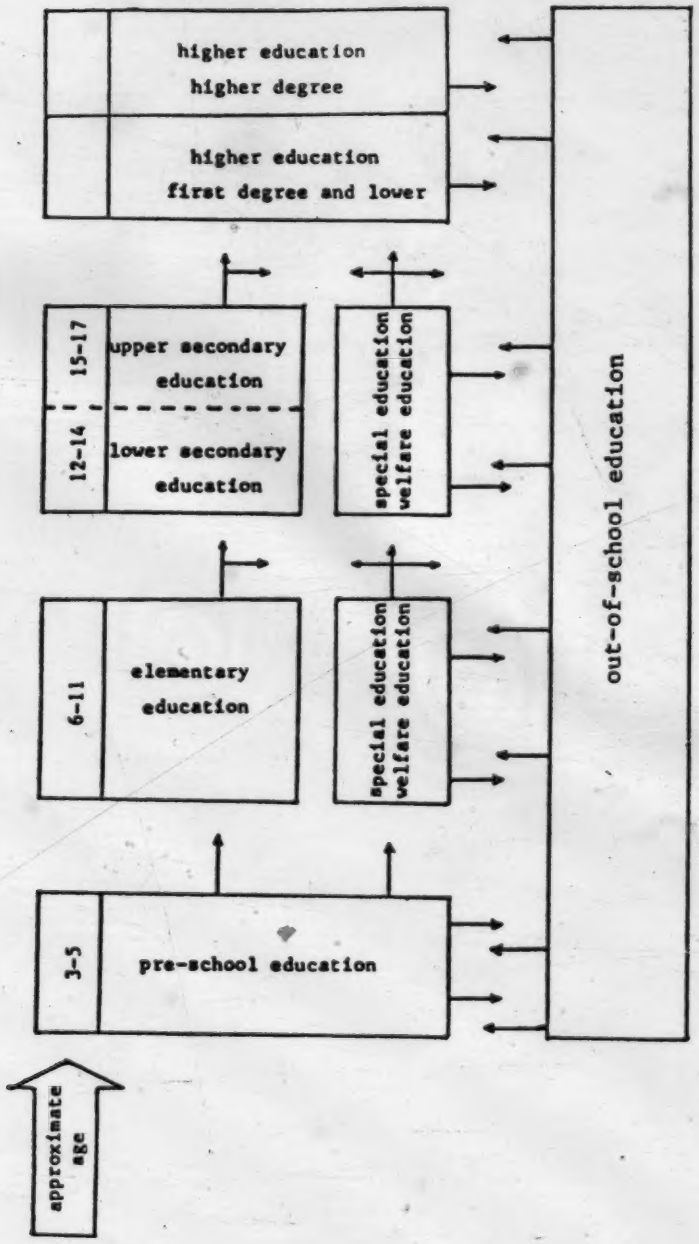

Figure 1: Thailand National Educational Scheme 1977

The latest national educational scheme was announced in 1977. It uses a 6-3-3-4 pattern which represents years of primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and higher education levels. At each level, the educational plan stresses meeting the needs of the individual (i.e. the school offers some options and programs for the disadvantaged) and of the society. The plan also attempts to enable the student at the end of each level to go out and function adequately in a particular work situation (The National Educational Scheme 1977:5).

Higher education aims at cultivating the individual learner's intellectual and academic advancement while at the same time creating the manpower to lead in the future development of the country. However, the present higher education system cannot serve the needs of all high school graduates.

The Development of the Open University in Thailand

Like other developing countries, Thailand is unable to support the educational demands of its population, especially with regard to higher education. Consequently, many school leavers never have an opportunity to pursue their learning interests.

In 1933, a year after the Thai revolution, the new government realized this need and subsequently founded

Thammasat University under the open admission policy. The method at the new university paralleled closely that of other conventional universities, except that class attendance was not compulsory. This university produced many thousands of graduates before adopting the closed admission policy in 1952 (Thammasat University, 1981:3).

After Thammasat University adopted the closed admission policy, opportunities for school leavers to pursue higher education were again limited, in spite of the increasing need in this field. This forced the government to re-evaluate its commitment to the open-university and in 1971 Ramkamhaeng University, an open-admission policy university, was established (RU Communication Committee, 1981:9). Like Thammasat University, RU used classroom instruction, but attendance was not compulsory. Radio and television broadcasts were used as supplementary aids to classroom instruction. The RU communication committee reported that "the number of enrollments at this university increased from at least 80,000 to 100,000 in a year, bringing the estimates for the total enrollment to 396,687 students in 1981 (RU Communication Committee, 1981:11)". With the huge increase in enrollment the university realized that it could no longer continue admitting new students on an open-admission policy basis. The Thai government therefore recommended that another open university be

founded.

The Office of University Affairs decided to establish a genuine open university based on the British model. After three years of planning, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University was finally created in September 1978. STOU is under the supervision of the Office of University Affairs and has the right to award its own degrees. The philosophical bases upon which STOU rests are outlined below (STOU Planning Division, 1981:2):

> As an open university, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University holds to the principle of lifelong education, and aims at improving the quality of life of the general public in response to the ever-increasing demand for higher education. The education programs are to be administered under the open admission system. The university will employ distance learning techniques to enable the student to study by himself without having to attend classes as in conventional university institutions. In this way, adult education is provided to those who are working, so that they may have a chance to raise their educational standards; people in all walks of life are given opportunities to enrich their knowledge and improve their professional competence. Moreover, opportunities are widened for high school graduates.

Curriculum and Instruction

STOU offers both degree and non-degree programs. In offering the degree program, courses in the field of specialization to be offered are based on the needs of the society. The non-degree program is offered as an educational service to the general public so as to promote

personal development and professional competence. It was found that during the period 1980-1981, courses offered were limited to education studies and management science. In 1982 some five other fields of study were added. These included law, economics, health science, home economics, and agriculture.

STOU employs a two-semester system: each semester lasts 15 weeks. The first semester runs from July 1st to October 20th and the second semester runs from December 1st to March 20th. The university also provides a summer semester which begins at the end of March and runs to the end of May.

In order to be qualified for the degree, the student is required to complete 132 to 144 credit units. A course is arranged in such a way as to provide an integrated study of related subjects and is worth 6 credit units. The student, in order to maintain her status, must take at least one course but not more than three courses in each semester. Those who take 3 courses in a semester can complete their degree programs in 4 years. Further, to maintain a high standard, the student is required to pass the comprehensive examination before being awarded the degree. In addition to the regular program, the STOU also offers continuing degree programs to those who hold a two-year university certificate or equivalent diploma. This latter category of student is required to complete 72-84 credit units in order to be

entitled to the degree.

Instructional Method

STOU employs the distance education techniques already mentioned (on page 7); main media, supporting media, and tutorial sessions. This technique enables students to study on their own at home without classroom attendance. The technique is composed of 5 elements which include self-study materials, radio programmes, television programmes, tutorial sessions and media services at local study centers, as well as enrichment activities. A more detailed description of each component follows.

1. **Self-Study Materials.** This element is composed of textbooks, workbooks, and handbooks of radio and television programmes accompanied by audio cassettes. These media are designed to be basic elements of the distance learning program and their purpose is to enable students to study on their own effectively. In addition, for each course, STOU provides one audio cassette which is used to orient the student to the course work and to provide an adequate study guide.

2. **Radio Programmes.** Radio programmes are designed to supplement the self-study materials. For each course, STOU provides seventeen 20-minute programmes. Each programme presents a set of ideas related to a certain point in the

unit. The radio programmes are normally broadcast by Radio Thailand, Thammasat University AM Radio Station, and the Department of Postal Service's AM Station. Broadcasting times are announced in the student handbook.

3. **Television Programmes**. Like radio programmes, the TV programme is used as a supplement to the self-study materials. The TV programme will present ideas and content that cannot be presented through the other media. STOU provides five to seven 30-minute programmes for each course.

4. **Tutorial Sessions and Media Services at Local Study Centers**. STOU provides tutorial sessions for students at local centers in almost all of provinces in Thailand. This element of the distance learning program is the only one that allows face-to-face contact between the tutor and the student. The student will have a chance to discuss ambiguous or difficult topics with the tutor and with other colleagues. Tutorial sessions help to minimize the sense of loneliness which some students experience. Students are expected to attend a tutorial session once a month on the weekend. Each session is three hours long and covers 5 units out of 15 units of the course. Sessions are conducted by local tutors. At the end of each semester there are review sessions which are conducted by STOU staff from Bangkok called "travelling lecturers". These sessions help students to gain an overall understanding of the subject

matter and also to help foster a sense of belonging to the university.

At each local center, there are self-study materials, audio cassettes, copies of radio programmes, video casettes, copies of TV programmes, films, and supplementary reading materials for STOU tutors and students. STOU also provides "STOU Corner" as a resource center at each provincial public library.

5. Enrichment Activities. For some courses, the student is required to attend an enrichment activity every week, each of which lasts 2 hours. Enrichment activities vary depending on course objectives and the nature of each course. Activities included in the enrichment activities are: experiments at a local study center or in a laboratory, field experience related to academic course work, participation in seminars or in simulation games. These activities are designed to extend the student's learning horizons and in particular to develop problem-solving techniques.

Evaluation System

The student is evaluated through both formative and summative techniques. The student's quality of work is measured by using a grading system which consists of 3 levels of performance: "H" for honours; "S" for

satisfactory; and "U" for unsatisfactory or failure. To qualify for the degree, the student must obtain an 'S-average' in all course requirements. The student may qualify for 'Second-class Honours' if she completes her course requirements with "H" in at least half of the courses required. Further, the student may qualify for the 'First-class Honours' if she completes her requirements with "H" in at least three fourths of the courses required.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In response to the problem presented in the introductory part, the focus of this study is the students' perceptions of their distance learning experience at STOU. The basic research question of this study is "How do the STOU students perceive the value of distance learning programs in helping them meet their educational objectives?" In order to address this basic question, the following related questions must be considered:

1. How do students presently experience distance learning at STOU?
2. What aspects of the experience do students perceive as contributions or hindrances to their learning?
3. How are these perceptions affected by personal and social circumstances?
4. In what way are the students' perceptions (tempered by

an understanding of their underlying circumstances and taking into consideration the experience of distance learning programs in the literature) suggestive of a set of guidelines and recommendations for improving the present program?

Purpose of the Study

The researcher intends to explore the students' experience of distance learning programs, to examine the value of distance learning programs (in helping students meet their educational objectives) as perceived by students, and to suggest some possible strategies for improvement of the distance learning programs.

Definition of terms

1. Open University: The open university is an educational institution which employs distance learning techniques in educating its students. The open university admits students on an open-admission policy and attempts to fulfill needs of adults who could not attend conventional universities (Perry:1977).
2. Distance Education: Distance education refers to an educational approach in which the learner is separated from the institution by time and/or space. Communication in distance education is noncontiguous

but interactive. Courses involve various media rather than face-to-face teaching (Brassard, 1982:308)

3. Distance learning experience. Distance learning experience refers to the various types of learning activities which are experienced by STOU students.
4. Distance learning programs. Distance learning programs refer to programs offered to distance learners at STOU. The programs are disseminated in the form of print materials, radio and TV programs, audio cassettes, and tutorial services.
5. Perception. Perception refers to the students' expressed understanding and judgment of the distance learning programs.
6. Value. Value refers to the usefulness of educational activities that the student experiences while participating in the STOU educational programs in helping them meet their educational objectives.

Delimitations

1. The sample of this study is delimited to students who enrolled at STOU in the Faculty of Educational Study and the Faculty of Management Science during the year 1982-1983 (460 students out of a target student population of 63,495 and an access student population of 11,904).

2. The sample of this study is delimited to two locations: Bangkok and Nakornsawan.
3. Variables to be described and analyzed in this study are delimited to those related to the distance learning programs in the Faculty of Educational Study and the Faculty of Management Science at STOU during the year 1980-1983.
4. Data to be described and analyzed are delimited to those secured through questionanaires and interviews.

Limitations

1. This study relies heavily on data secured from questionnaires and interview respondents. The accuracy of answers to the questionnaires and interview questions may affect the validity and reliability of this study.
2. The study is limited by the responses of the selected respondents.

Assumptions

In this study, it is assumed that:

1. It is necessary to discover students' perceptions of distance learning programs in order to propose improvements in distance learning programs.
2. The use of questionnaires together with an in-depth

interview approach for selected subjects constitutes an effective methodology for studying students' perceptions of distance learning programs at STOU.

3. The questionnaire and interview respondents will provide accurate data.
4. The sample size will be representative of the population from which it will be drawn.

Implications

The researcher hopes that findings of this study may provide meaningful data to staff and serve the better operation of STOU. It may provide important basic data for further research. In addition, this study may not only benefit the Thai situation, but also similar situations in other developing countries wherever an open university exists.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since its opening in 1969, the British Open University has become popular and has gained more acceptance from the English people year by year. The open-admission policy employed by this university offers greater opportunities to adults to pursue their educational career. The increase in enrollment from 19,581 in 1971 to 59,968 in 1981 should be considered as a sign of success (Rumble and Keegan, 1982:218). Harry (1982:176) found that among the 61,007 new OU enrollments in 1980, 23.4% of them were not qualified to attend conventional universities. Therefore, it might be appropriate to say that the British Open University is in a position to offer hope to prospective adults for a better position in the future.

Enrollment figures might be considered as one of predictors of success. However, the number of graduates in each year should not be considered as less important. Rumble and Keegan (1982:219) found that among the 19,581 new OU enrollments in 1971, 56.0% of them graduated with their degrees from the OU by the end of 1980, while 50% and 49.4% of the new enrollments in 1972 and 1973 respectively received their degrees from the OU by the end of 1980.

In response to demands for education of English adults, the OU has added new programs and disciplines to those

existing from year to year. Harry (1982:175) reports that in 1982, there were already three types of programs available at the OU: the associate program, the undergraduate program, and the graduate program. The associate program offers short courses to those who do not plan to complete degrees within a certain period, but only attend the OU for refreshment and career improvement. Harry (1982:176) describes the associate program available at the OU below:

1. Community education courses. These are short courses (8-14 weeks) not designed to be at degree level and not involving the full range of support services offered to students. These include the program in the area of parent, health, employment and consumer education.

2. In-service teacher training courses. The university's first diploma course, for the diploma in Reading Development, has been produced in this area, together with school-focused courses and self-study packs for teachers.

3. Health and social welfare courses. These have so far been produced parts of which are also available as self-study packs.

4. Technological updating materials. Two self-study packs on micro-processors are available.

5. Management education. The first materials from this area should be available in 1983.

6. Courses drawn from the undergraduate program.

7. Courses in historical, cultural and political subjects created from existing OU courses materials.

The undergraduate program offers courses which cover thirty disciplines relating to literature, history, music,

biology, chemistry, and electronics. However, due to some constraints and limitations, the OU does not offer undergraduate programs in medicine, veterinary medicine, or law (Harry, 1982:176).

Until 1982, the only graduate program available at the OU was the program in Philosophy. In 1981, it was found that there were 694 students enrolled in this program whereas there were 32 and 25 students who graduated with their Ph.D. and Master's degrees in that same year.

The popularity and the acceptance of the OU among English people has spread to other countries. Many governments of other nations have imported the idea of the British Open University to their educational system. The founding of the Allama Iqbal Open University, in Pakistan in 1974 is an example of this importation. Keegan and Rumble (1982:25) found that by 1982 thirteen distance teaching universities had already been founded. These include the British Open University, Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia in Spain, Free University of Iran, Fern Universitat of the Federal Republic of Germany, Everyman's University of Israel, the Allama Iqbal Open University of Pakistan, Athabasca University in Alberta, Canada, Universidad Nacional Abierta of Venezuela, Universidad Estatal a Distancia of Costa Rica, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University of Thailand, Central Broadcasting and

Television University of China, Sri Lanka Open University of Sri Lanka, and the Open University of the Netherlands.

Along with the increase in enrollments, programs, and open universities, Vanderheyden and Brunel (1977:63) found that learning packages, texts, and study guides produced by open university staff are well prepared and are used by many conventional university students and practitioners.

The open universities in most countries are more recent developments as compared with conventional universities. The former have encountered various problems in carrying out their tasks. Some of these problems have been solved or minimized. Still, many issues remain to be addressed. In order to provide some information with regard to such issues, the writer will review related literature under the following topics: 1) research on open universities, 2) characteristics of open university students, 3) open university pedagogies, and 4) strength and weakness of the open university.

RESEARCH ON OPEN UNIVERSITIES

The review of research on open universities covers the following topics: 1) research on the instructional system, 2) research on tutoring systems, 3) research on communication system, 4) research on student pacing, 5) research on student completion, and 6) research on

students' perceptions.

Research on the Instructional System. Students enrolling in open universities are encouraged to learn on their own. They are not required to attend classes regularly. There are, however, tutorial sessions provided, but these sessions are not mandatory. The Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) which was initiated by Keller (1968) is therefore best suited to this system of learning. PSI has five basic characteristics which are as follows: (1) reliance on the written word for instruction, (2) self-pacing, (3) mastery learning, (4) use of tutors to help students and give them feedback, and (5) the use of lecture and demonstration as means of motivation rather than sources of information. Kulik, Kulik, and Colin (1979), in their study of effectiveness of the PSI, found that the PSI produces higher achievement and course ratings than other instructional methods. Similar research was conducted by the REDEAL[1] team at Athabasca University in 1982. After employing different PSI models with different groups of students, Coldeway (1982:31) summarized:

> Results showed that the PSI phone version produced higher completion rates while there were minimal differences between PSI mail (delayed feedback) and instructional base line (self-feedback) versions. There were no differences in examination performance for any version. When given a choice, students opted

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[1]REDEAL= Research and Evaluation of Distance Education for the Adult Learner

clearly for the PSI phone version and this version increased the numbers completing early units of the courses. In later units of the course, however, differences in completion rates were minimal.

Research on PSI in the open university, however, is very limited. Most researchers have tried to determine relationships between PSI and completion rates but rarely consider personal factors of students and tutors' characteristics that might have an impact on the use of PSI and completion rates.

Research on Tutoring System. Tutoring is the key factor that determines success for most open university students. Harris (1975) surveyed characteristics of the British Open University tutors and found that most tutors are hired on a part-time basis although some other open universities prefer to use full-timers or a combination of the two. Baath (1976), looking from another dimension, asked twelve institutions in Europe which employ distance teaching methods about characteristics of tutors best suited to distance teaching institutions and found that most institutions expect their tutors to be good teachers, good administrators, good counsellors, good facilitators, good motivators, and good record keepers. Most institutions do not want to see their tutors act only as the teacher.

Stein (1960) studied relations between tutors' personality and learning success of students and found that there is a direct relationships between tutors' personality

and students' success.

At Athabasca University, the REDEAL team (Coldeway, 1982:32) studied two aspects of the tutor function: skills required by tutors and impacts of tutors' skills on learners. Findings of the study led the administration to organize workshops which were proposed to be beneficial to the tutors and consequently to students at Athabasca University.

Research on Communication System. Communication success is the predictor of open university students' success. This system of education relies heavily on mediated two-way communication which is less effective as compared to face-to-face communication. The question is how to make mediated two-way communication become more effective. Researchers in the field of distance teaching, for the most part, try to study impacts of different modes of communication, mediated two-way and face-to-face communication on students' learning performance and completion rates.

Since face-to-face contact was perceived as the best means of communication, researchers in this area focused their attention on potential means to facilitate this type of communication. Wangdahl (1977) reviewed literature on face-to-face contact and concluded that face-to-face contact reduced students' loneliness and strengthened students'

motivation.

Kustermann (1970) found that 39% of 3,000 correspondence students who responded to his questionnaire indicated that seminars were a valuable contact. However, he concluded that:

> There are correspondence students who do not want any contact whatever with anyone. These students have deliberately chosen correspondence courses to avoid group participation. For them the isolation can be an advantage which makes them prefer correspondence education to traditional education, a fact which correspondence education should use pedagogically.

Bolte, Bohme, and Schwier (1974) studied the motivational influence of seminars on 1,818 correspondence through questionnaires and found that the dropout rate in the group receiving the home-based package alone was 36%. The dropout frequency in the group receiving home-based package in addition to three seminars was 30% and in the group receiving regular seminars with the home-based package, the dropout rate was 13%. They concluded that, when seminars were combined with the home-study package, students may be motivated to stick with the course rather than drop out.

At Athabasca University, Peruniak (1980) studied the impact of seminars on students' completion rate and found that "seminar groups had higher completion rates on the first credit of the course than learners who did not attend seminars. However, the data do not allow this phenomenon to

be attributed solely to seminars."

Research on Student Pacing. Students in open universities are encouraged to pace themselves. However, Born and Whelan (1973) and Glick and Semb (1978) found that self-pacing leads to loneliness and procrastination and finally to dropping out.

In order to provide more flexibility to students, Athabasca University uses the computer to produce individual academic schedules for its students (Coldeway, 1982:33). The schedule reminds individual students about due dates of the assignments and possible dates for taking examination. Unfortunately, many students have opted not to use the schedule. Spencer et al. (1980:33) describe the relationship between pacing and completion rates as follows: "the paced package incorporated with the meeting regularly between tutors and students produced a higher completion rate than the regular self-paced format".

Crawford (1980) compared completion rate in an identical course offered at Athabasca University and at North Island College in British Columbia on a self-paced basis and at the Open Learning Institute in British Columbia where the semester system fixed the starting date and the date of examinations. The results indicated higher completion rates in the institution paced format at the Open Institute, in conformity with the results of the

paced-package study.

The greater rigidity of the paced format may produce higher completion rates but at the same time this rigidity may also prevent students from attending the university.

Research on Student Completion. Completion is another concern of most open university staff. Most people expect students who enroll with the open university to complete their degree programs whereas in fact the university also provides the option of pursuing associate or short-course program. The intent of most studies done in this area is to survey reasons why students drop out.

Astin (1975) examined factors contributing to student dropout rates and found that poor high school grades and low standardized test scores increase the dropout rate. In this same study, Astin also found that the educational background of the parents proportionally influenced students' persistence while career goals of students increase their persistence.

At Athabasca University, Hammer and Smith (1979) studied reasons for the dropout of 25 students who had been enrolled in Psychology Today and World Ecology and found that personal problems such as home responsibilities and lack of time to study were cited as the most frequent reasons for withdrawal. A few of them cited a "high demands of the course", "too little help from tutors", and

"job-related problems" as reasons for dropping out.

Students at different distance teaching institutions may encounter different problems; therefore the reason for withdrawal will vary. However, it should be remembered that open universities aim at providing educational services to adults who because of personal constraints cannot attend conventional institutions. Therefore, the completion of an individual course rather than the whole program is already considered a success of that individual student.

Research on Students' Perceptions. Based on the writer's library survey, research on students' perceptions in the field of the open university is limited. Knapper and Wasylycia (1980) studied characteristics and attitudes of correspondence students at the University of Waterloo by mailing questionnaires to 1,283 students enrolled with the university and found that:

1. the major motive for enrolling in correspondence program is the opportunity to complete a degree;
2. the great majority (87%) expressed high satisfaction with their experience of correspondence learning and that a major attraction of this type of education appeared to be the opportunity it provides to combine full time employment with study;
3. lack of personal contacts with instructors and other students appears to lead to some uncertainties about course requirements, for example, what to expect in course examination; and
4. an important factor in selecting each particular program appeared to be the reputation of the university of Waterloo itself.

Robert Lefrance (1982) studied students' perceptions of media in French University Distance Education Systems by mailing questionnaires to students who enrolled in three different disciplines and found that students like a balanced media mix consisting of radio broadcasts, TV broadcasts, audiocassettes, books, mineographed materials, one-day seminars, and workshops. Students also indicated that components of media prepared for each discipline should be varied, and that no single component should be predominant.

Stringer (1981) studied students' perceptions of French programs offered by Athabasca University by using questionnaires and telephone with 43 students enrolled in French 103, French 242, and French 361 and found that:

1. the greatest deficiency of the program seems to be in the lack of conversation practice;

2. students encountered difficulties with grammar in French 242, and French 361;

3. students perceptions of the usefulness of radio and TV programs in helping the development of verbal skill varieds a good deal, but most students believe that audiocassettes provided were a valuable part of the package;

4. reactions of students to tutoring were mixed. Some students dislike talking to a disembodied voice, others complained of poor quality of sound on the line, and a few confessed to feeling embarrassed and inhibited even before the members of their own families who might overhead the conversation;

5. seminars considered very useful by those who participated. However, they were poorly attended

and were regarded in general as unanticipated inconvenience; and

6. convenience and flexibility were the feature that attracted students to Athabasca University.

Based on the findings of this library survey, the writer concludes that research on students' perception of the distance teaching university is mostly limited to course evaluation instead of examination of experiential aspects of the students' lives and study while enrolled at the Open University. It was found that researchers preferred to use only questionnaires in the conducting of research, and that the content of these questionnaires was mostly limited to discussing program strengths and weaknesses. This reliance on questionnaires limits the acquisition of data, and consequently prevents the evaluator from arriving at a more complete understanding of student perceptions. By using only the questionnaire, the researcher cannot obtain information concerning all dimensions of experiences that students have gained from the university nor detect goal attainment of students and the university itself. To improve the quality of research in this field, the writer considers Holmberg's (1981:112) views to be appropriate and relevant:

> The information acquired through questionnaires and through analyses of students' achievements evidently does not give a complete picture of the students' situation, their interaction with the course and their particular difficulties. For this reason, attempts have been made to find out not only what students'

> learning conditions are, but also what their life in general is in relation to their studies. This approach, which thus pays particular attention to the study milieu, is sometimes referred to as 'evaluation as illumination'. In-depth interviews are made with individual students with a view to coming to grips with what happens to them, to their life while they study, rather than to sample the general reactions of the students to the course under study, which is what happens when questionnaires are used.

The integration of questionnaires and in-depth interviews into the research design should help researchers succeed in finding solutions to existing problems as well as acquiring information which is relevant to the development of theory in the field of distance education. Further, findings derived through the integration method would result in a broader picture of the university's operation and would allow the authorities to make more reasoned policy decisions.

The open university, however, has its own uniqueness. It is unique in terms of students, instructional strategies, and evaluation methods. The review of characteristics of OU students, pedagogies, and strengths and weaknesses of the operation of the open university in the following sections should provide a frame of reference to this study.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OU STUDENTS

To improve the effectiveness of curriculum development and the learning process of students at the open university, it is necessary that OU staff understand the nature of their

students, who are different from conventional university students in many ways. McIntosh et al. (1976) found that there were at least three factors that determine the make-up such a student body. First, the structure of an educational institution will attract a certain type of student and repel others. In the case of OU, the student body is comprised of students attracted by the flexible study opportunities. Second, the characteristics possessed by individual students will influence the character of the student body as a whole. Third, the admission policy of a university is an overt means of attracting a certain type of student, and therefore influencing the make-up of the pupil population.

The characteristics of those who know about OU structure and the number of those who apply to the OU varies from place to place. In some countries, even though there is a huge number of students looking for spaces to pursue their higher education many of them are not aware of educational possibilities with the OU. Some individuals who know that they are eligible for admission to the OU are deterred from applying because of the complex admission procedure. The characteristics of "those who know" and "those who apply" therefore determine the characteristics of the student body at the OU.

With regard to the admission policy, McIntosh et al. (1976), Tunstall (1974), Athabasca University (1982) found

that the admission policy and the goals of most open universities all over the world are similar. Most open universities provide a second chance for pursuing higher education to all adults without requiring an entrance examination or formal educational qualifications. Woodly and McIntosh (1980) also found that some OUs provide places for young students who are even unqualified for places in conventional universities. This admission policy thus results in the uniqueness of OU students.

The surveys conducted by Tunstall (1974), McIntosh et al.(1976), and Lefrance (1982) indicated that the majority of OU students are adults with a wide age variation. Also many are married and working full-time thus have less time for study than conventional university students do.

Further, McIntoch et al.(1976) and Tunstall (1974) found that some students are not qualified for the program to which they are being admitted while others are, and that some already hold another degree. With regard to socio-economic status of students, Datt (1982) and McIntosh et al.(1976) found that OU students's economic status is generally lower than that of conventional university students. Many of them are separated from the institution by distance. This uniqueness of OU students determines the pedagogical approach of open universities.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

There are several factors that may determine the pedagogical approach at each open university. Baath (1982) and Lefrance (1982) propose that in designing a pedagogical approach, the following factors be taken into account: basic view of learning, the variety of instructional goals, students' characteristics, different teaching environments, and economic constraints. The instructional designer should select the most appropriate pedagogical approach to help students meet individuals' goals. In addition, Hutchinson (1982) explains that the institution must match its own facilities and production methods with the facilities and living conditions of students. Knowles (1970) claims that the pedagogical approach which is appropriate for children might not be appropriate for adults. Further, Javis (1980) suggests that in designing the pedagogical approach, the OU staff should combine various perspectives.

The above mentioned factors make the pedagogical approach at OUs unique. Most OUs employ the self-instructional, home-based, and multi-media approach. The OU timetable is unusual in that students normally proceed at their own pace.

Taylor (1979) suggests that the integration of multi-media be made suitable for OU students since each medium could help students achieve different sets of

objectives. Mittlestet (1979:50) suggests the media used with OU students be composed of studies guides, video programmes, textbooks, reading and other print materials, learning activities, communication with students, summative examination and assignments, review cassettes, and administrative/faculty course guide. However, according to Baath's (1982) survey, it was found that print materials are the key medium often used by the 13 distance teaching institutions around the world.

Two-way Communication in the Open University. The communication channel between OU students and instructors is a major factor in the success of the OU instructional system. The two-way communication may take place at a distance and/or by face-to-face contacts.

According to Holmberg (1981:83), the purposes of two-way communication are:

> To support students' motivation and interest by contact with an encouraging tutor and counsellor;
>
> To support and facilitate student learning by having students apply the knowledge and skills acquired as well as by tutors' comments, explanations, and suggestions;
>
> Assessing students' progress in order to provide them with an instrument by means of which they can judge their educational situation and needs and by means of which marks can be awarded.

Holmberg (1977:63) found that there are certain types of

media that should be used to facilitate two-way communication at a distance. These media are print or written materials, audiotape cassettes, telephone, and computer-assisted instruction. He further explains that print or written materials used between students and the institution are the primary media used to facilitate two-way communication. Audiotape cassettes are similar to print materials but could better create closeness to reality and make communication more interactive. The two media mentioned may allow one-to-one contact but they place some limitation on time owing to delayed-feedback. Marvis (1980) found telephone and teleconferencing better than print materials and audiotape cassettes in terms of facilitating two-way communication since they permit immediate interchange between two individuals. Computer-assisted instruction is another medium that can be used to facilitate interactive communication. However, currently, Madden (1982) has found that the use of the computer in most OUs is very limited.

Baath (1982) found that face-to-face contact between the tutor and the student was the best means of fostering two-way communication in the OU system. Taylor (1979) suggests that in order to facilitate face-to-face contact, OU students may set up self-help groups for mutual support.

The Use of Print Materials. Among distance educators, print material has been accepted as the most important medium. However, the relationship between the dropout phenomenon and the quality of print material has rarely been examined. Connors (1979) claims that the dropout phenomenon is significantly associated with the design of courses, and particularly the way in which the learning materials are written and developed. He further states that good materials are much more than one-way messages to the student; in fact they are essential to the distance education system. If they are developed and used properly, print materials possess several advantages. Holmberg (1977) claims that print materials allow individualization of information, function in a wide range of study environments, are easily accessible for revisions, and are cheaper than any other media. Taylor (1979) found other advantages of print materials. With the use of print materials, students could progress at their own pace. The individual student could return to and repeat her own lessons at a convenient time. Also, print materials are more easily sorted, reorganized, and selected to suit the individual student.

Although print materials may possess several advantages, they also have some limitations especially when they are produced for a huge group of students. It is rather difficult to produce print materials to suit every

individual students' needs. Trillo (1982) found that some problems related to the production and the distribution of print materials in the distance education system are finance, language, culture, and politics.

To make the print material more advantageous, Connors (1979) suggested that distance learning materials should be clear, interesting and activity oriented, communicate directly and personally with students, take full account of students' limited study opportunity, and provide clear guidance to students. Connors (1979) also suggested that authors of print materials should be those who are expert in their own subject areas, good writers, good teachers, and good planners.

The Use of Broadcasting. Broadcasting, originally used in the British OU, is widely accepted in the OU instructional system. The use of television and radio broadcasting helps minimize problems concerning education at a distance. It reduces costs and improves quality of information delivery. Chu and Schram (1967) claim that TV is a potential motivator, and if it is developed and used properly, it could be valuable to developing countries in educating learners at a distance. However, when comparing TV and radio to print materials, it is found that TV and radio are more expensive. To make the best use of TV and radio broadcasting, Holmberg (1981) suggests that these

media be used to their maximum potential. They should be used for demonstrating concepts or processes that students find difficult to understand, or for motivating student interest. In supporting Holmberg's suggestion, Goodenough (1979) states that "there has to be a clear rationale for using expensive broadcast media and a clear policy on the role of broadcast". Seligman (1979) and Stevenson (1979) further suggest that to integrate broadcast media into the distance education system, the broadcaster needs to consider the social and economic context of the receiver. The broadcaster needs to identify her target population and educational needs. Also, the broadcaster needs to identify the degree of student involvement and accessibility. Crow (1977) found that TV would be used to best advantage when one-way communication is desired. Holmberg (1981) and McIntosh et al.(1976) observe that TV is best used to convey information that requires special visual effects, such as demonstrations, dramatic presentations, discussion, and visual accounts of the arts and science.

Tutorial Service. The use of a tutorial service is a means of creating two-way communication between students and OU staff. According to literature reviewed (Holmberg:1974; Harris:1975; Salter:1982; Cochran and Meech:1982), tutorial services may be categorized into three types: 1) telephone tutorial services, 2) mobile tutorial services, and 3)

local/regional tutorial services. Williams and Chapanis (1976) found that there were no differences between face-to-face and telophone tutorials for tasks involving information transmission, problem-solving, and generation of ideas. The mobile tutorial service is another type which is provided to students by most OUs. "The mobile tutor is one who is available to assist students in all courses and moves from one location to another (Salter:1982)".

The local regional service center can provide tutorial services in a few different ways: telephone tutorial, group discussion, self-help group tuition, and peer tuition. In some instances, staff at the local regional center may organize group discussions on topics which are related to some courses. Students who are enrolled in the same course are also encouraged to exchange ideas and opinions for a better understanding of course materials. At some local regional centers, students who are more advanced in their studies may be invited to provide tutorial help to incoming students.

Tutorial services rely heavily on the quality of tutors responsible for each course or type of tuition. Baath (1980) found that since most tutors are hired on a part-time basis and have little teaching experience they encounter several problems. In Britain, Glatter and Weddell (1971) found that most tutors fail to create personal contact and

do not provide supporting comments thus lowering student achievement and increasing the dropout rate. Thiagarajan (1978) states that good tutors are those who can minimize students' loneliness and create interactive communication with the students. Baath (1976) claims that good tutors not only act as teachers but they also act as administrators, counsellors, facilitators, motivators, and record keepers. Williams (1980) suggests that OU tutors should be trained in many ways: academic, tutoring, and interpersonal skills. Lewis (1982) observes that there is no other relationship that could induce students to attach themselves to the institution better than friendliness. According to Lewis, friendliness means greater probability of success, motivation, encouragement, attachment to the institution, feedback, and decreased loneliness.

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF THE OU OPERATION

Hammer (1979:10) found that distance learning was advantageous because:

1. It frees students from time and place constraints. Students do not need to attend a lecture; therefore they have more time to devote to studying- especially working adults.
2. Students can work on their lessons independently, illness of professors does not interupted the student's study.
3. If a course is taken for professional upgrading, knowledge acquired is more related to students' experience.
4. Students take greater responsibility for their

studies than those who attend traditional institutions.
5. Distance education make economic use of the professor.
6. Distance education provides the opportunity to study as well as to work.
7. Distance education provides a possibility for professional advancement for individuals especially adults who could not attend a traditional institutions because of financial reasons.

In support of Hammer's findings, Angere (1982) and Grivel and Jamison (1982) found that the cost per student was lower since the open education system can enroll unlimited numbers of students to share the fixed cost of the program operation. Further, Gupta (1982) found that OU course materials are usually planned by experts and revised from time to time. Therefore, students who expose themselves to this system will have greater opportunities to use standard or high quality materials produced by the expert. In addition, the high degree of flexibility of learning methods and the open-admission policy should also be considered as advantages of the open universities.

Although distance learning retains several advantages, disadvantages of the system are also observed. Hammer (1979:13) studied disadvantages of distance learning at Athabasca University and summarizes:

1. Students have little or no opportunities to discuss the subject matter with fellow students and professors.
2. Students outside metropolitan areas have less access to the library than students at traditional institutions.
3. Distance learning is not suitable for students who

prefer direct contact or interaction with professors.
4. Distance learning can lead to overburdening of students- especially for those who are working.

Also upholding Hammer's findings, De Goede and Hokobergen (1978:453-455) claim that distance learning students encounter more barriers than conventional university students do. Miller (1979) suggests that there are two types of barriers that impede distance learning students' completion: dispositional and situational. Most students lack interest, time, and finances while many of them have problems concerning poor health and old age. In addition, many students also encounter stress due to job responsibilities which they find physically and mentally demanding both at home and at work.

The researcher believes that the major strength of the open university is its capacity to offer educational alternatives to adults who have no opportunities to pursue higher education in conventional universities. The open-admission policy adopted by all distance teaching universities makes the educational aspirations of adult students a potential reality. Unfortunately, however, students have little opportunities to share their ideas with their colleagues or even discuss topics with which they are experiencing difficulty. Students who are less intelligent and unfamiliar with the distance learning system are prone to even more problems. As a result, the open university is

only marginally successful in facilitating authentic knowledge enrichment, despite its organizational accessibility and flexibility.

SUMMARY

As compared to conventional universities, it seems to the researcher that the open university encounters different kinds of problems from the conventional university does. The dropout rate is the main problem. The open-admission policy employed by the open university creates greater educational opportunities but at the same time it diversifies students backgrounds: socially, academically, and economically. Therefore, it is more difficult for the university to create learning materials to meet this diversity. Further, in reviewing the literature, the writer observes that open universities located in different countries experience their own unique problems. Some solutions to these problems may be imported while many of them may not. In each case, the open university will have to seek its own solutions. The STOU of Thailand is no exception. The study of students' perceptions of distance learning programs at STOU by using the design followed should lead to better solutions and improve the operation of this university.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to investigate the question raised in this study, both quantitative and the qualitative approaches were selected as a combined design for this research. The questionnaire helped the researcher collect general information concerning the means by which STOU students learn, their perceptions of distance learning programs, and the personal and social circumstances experienced by students that affect these perceptions.

The individual in-depth interview helped the researcher discover the deeper meaning of students' perceptions concerning the value of distance learning programs. Also, the interview helped the researcher uncover aspects of the life-world of STOU students and the relationship between their studies and their lived experiences which could not be obtained through questionnaire.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses three topics which are considered as major elements of this design:(1) sources of data; (2) research instruments; and (3) research methodology.

SOURCES OF DATA

Research data were collected from the first and the second-year STOU students who enrolled in the continuing program in the School of Education and the School of Management Science. The number of student sampled from each group are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of Respondents selected from each category of students.

Locations	Education		Management Science		Total
	1st year N	2nd year N	1st year N	2nd year N	N
Bangkok	80	80	80	80	320
Nakornsawan	35	35	35	35	140
Total	115	115	115	115	460

Reasons for the selection of the study samples from these locations and programs of study follow. First, STOU students are scattered throughout all 72 provinces of Thailand. However, the economic, social, and environmental characteristics of students who reside in Bangkok and

surrounding provinces are similar but are different from those of students who reside in other provinces which are far away from Bangkok. Students who reside in Bangkok and the nearby provinces have greater access to TV programs, good libraries, experts and tutors than do students who reside in other provinces. The samples selected from these two locations should best represent the population of this study.

Second, the samples selected from Bangkok and surrounding provinces were larger than those from Nakornsawan since the larger proportion of enrollments come from Bangkok. For instance, in 1982, 526 of the first-year education students were from Bangkok where only 200 of them were from Nakornsawan. Therefore, the 80 first-year education students sampled from Bangkok and the 35 first-year education students sampled from Nakornsawan should best represent these two groups of students.

Third, the selection of respondents in Nakornsawan to represent STOU students who reside in the rural areas made it easier for the researcher to find research assistants and to contact research participants. With time and budget constraints, the selection of samples from Nakornsawan should best fit the researcher's situation.

Finally, the selection of samples from the School of Education and the School of Management Science is

appropriate since these two schools offer continuing programs to students. The students are expected to complete the program within two years. Most second year students who were selected as respondents in the study were about to complete their degrees. They were in a position to be able to evaluate their experiences at the STOU. Also, they were in a position to be able to recall their experiences more completely thus hopefully making the data more valid. However, the newcomers, the first-year students, might encounter several problems and difficulties in adjusting themselves to the distance learning system. They might need assistance from tutors, peers, and administrative staff. Therefore this group of students was also selected as samples of this study.

The researcher should have included students who had dropped out as questionnaire respondents of this study. Unfortunately, searching for addresses of dropouts was not successful since the university did not keep records or files of such students.

The samples mentioned were questionnaire respondents only. Interviewees for this study were selected partly from questionnaire respondents and partly from dropouts. The number of interview informants is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Number and Location of Interview Informants*.

Location	Education			Management Science			Total
	1st Year N	2nd Year N	Dropouts N	1st Year N	2nd Year N	Dropouts N	N
Bangkok	1	1	1	1	2	1	7
Nakornsawan	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Total	2	2	2	2	3	2	13

*See also Informants' Personal Profiles in Appendix E

Time constraints affected the number of informants selected. The researcher had to complete data collection within a certain period, and most students were also responsible for their office work besides their university assignments. In addition, the difficulty in communicating with students was a factor which limited the number of interview informants. However, the researcher believes that the data received is sufficient for the research as the interview data are to be used for clarification of the questionnaire data and not for generalized conclusions. Informants were encouraged to disclose all relevant data. All informants were interviewed twice with the exception of one individual who was inteviewed three times. In the second or third interview, each informant was asked to

verify accounts received from the previous interview at the beginning of the session. Ambiguous and unclear points were pursued. Therefore, the data received are considered valid and reliable. In addition, the data received from students who had dropped out should better explain why they had done so. Their perceptions of the value of the program are significant for this study.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

This study secured data from 460 students enrolling at the STOU during 1982-1983, which was considered a large of sample. Therefore, the use of a questionnaire was appropriate. Verma and Beard (1981:61) state the advantages of the questionnaire as:

> Survey is a useful and widely used type of research...The method seems to have advantage of being an effective way of collecting data from a large number of sources, relatively cheaply and perhaps in a short time. Furthermore, the results can be analyzed quickly and action can be taken if this is the object of the study. Surveys usually make use of sampling to produce valid and reliable generalization.

Because the potential of the questionnaires, mentioned above, together with the researcher's many constraints and the large size of sample, the questionnaire was considered to be the most suitable instrument for this research. However, the questionnaire is disadvantageous in many ways. Among others, Mouly (1970:243) cites disadvantages of the

questionnaire as:

> The validity of questionnaire data also depends in a crucial way on the ability and willingness of the respondent to provide the information requested... Members of the lower intellectual and educational groups tend not to answer and, if they do, to introduce an element of invalidity by their inability to interpret the questions or to express their responses clearly.

Due to these disadvantages of the questionnaire, the researcher recognized the limits of data obtained as a guide to the students' meaning. It is also hardly possible for the researcher to understand the life-world of each student. The use of the questionnaire only is insufficient. To minimize this deficiency, the in-depth interview was used as a supplementary instrument. The interview accounts would verify questionnaire data and help the researcher to better understand the perceptions of STOU students. Further, the interpretive accounts constructed on the basis of these interviews were validated by informants. With regard to advantages of the in-depth interview, Spradley (1980:9) contends:

> The explanation of the many sided and deeply rooted characteristics of responses enable the interviewer to determine the degree of detachment or of personal involvement in the experience and to evaluate the peripheral or salient character of the responses...The degree of involvement is not indicated in summary expression of preferences.

In addition, the in-depth interview technique provided flexibility to the interviewer, and she could use

supplementary questions as deemed appropriate. Mouly (1970:266) states this flexibility as:

> The flexibility of the unstructured interview is undoubtedly its greatest strength. Not only does it enable the investigator to pursue a given lead in order to gain insight into the problem and to obtain more adequate answers but, more important, it frequently lead to significant insights in unexpected directions. As he pursues various leads, the investigator may find his problem shift and become entirely different.

The conducting of interviews, however, requires much time and effort. In this study, it was impossible to interview all the 460 students who were selected as questionnaire respondents. Therefore, the use of questionnaire was needed to collect basic and general information that could be obtained through the questionnaire. In this case, the use of both questionnaire and in-depth interview hopefully results in valid, reliable, and verifiable accounts. This approach is supported by Glaser and Strauss (1967:18) when they state:

> In many instances, both forms of data are necessary- not quantitative used to test qualitative, but both used as supplements, as mutual verification and, most important for us, as different forms of data on the same subject, which when compared will generate theory.

The Development of Research Instruments.

1. The Development of the Questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study is the modification of Duby's instrument (1977), the British Open University team's

instrument (1976), Hammer and Smith's instrument (1979), and the ideas stemming from the review of related literature. The questionnaire was modified to fit the general context of the operation of STOU and to serve the purposes of this research.

In the development of the questionnaire, the researcher first developed the questionnaire in English then translated it into Thai for data collection.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire each item was screened and revised by the members of the advisory committee and research specialist (Professor Thomas Maguire). Then each item was translated into the Thai language. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, three doctoral students from Thailand currently studying at the University of Alberta who had never seen the English version were requested to translate from the Thai version into English. The items which led to ambiguity and misunderstanding were rewritten and revised by the researcher, then reviewed again by the three Thai doctoral students and the Thai professor at the University of Alberta.

After verification, the questionnaire consisted of four parts: (1) a personal data sheet; (2) a section in which students were asked to give details about their educational experiences at STOU; (3) a section in which students were

asked about their perceptions of STOU distance learning programs; and (4) a section in which students were asked about their suggestions for improvement (see also Appendix A).

Part I:Personal Data Sheet. This part is intended to seek data concerning personal and demographic variables. These include: sex, age, place of residence, educational background, occupation, sources of financial supports, monthly income (if employed), average work-hour (if employed), reasons for attending STOU, field of study, years of study, and number of courses passed.

This information was used to determine the relationship between students' perceptions and such factors.

Part II:Students' Educational Experience at STOU. This part consisted of a list of experiences and activities that students gained and engaged in during the time they were enrolled with the STOU. Students were asked to indicate experiences they gained and the degree of participation in such experiences and activities. These experiences and activities include: average study hours, difficulty in receiving instructional materials, accessibility to educational services and media provided by the university, and frequency of tutoring activities and services participated in by students.

This information was used to explain experiences and activities gained and participated in by the STOU students. Also, the information reflects difficulties of students in participating in or gaining such activities or experiences.

Part III:Students' Perceptions of Distance Learning Programs. This part consisted of a list of activities, experiences, and services offered to students by the STOU. Students were asked to evaluate the value of such activities, experiences, and services from their own point of view. Also, students were asked to indicate the degree of overall satisfaction with the program and to evaluate the impediments to their learning progress and success.

This information was used to determine the value of experiences, activities, and services offered to students by the STOU and to determine factors impeding students' progress and success.

Part IV: Suggestions by Students. This part consisted of a list of suggestions that might be proposed by students. Students were asked to indicate the weaknesses of programs and learning activities, to suggest changes to these programs, and to propose activities that should be pursued by the university. Space was provided for written comments. The information obtained through these suggestions should result in proper research suggestions.

Piloting the Questionnaire. To ensure the content validity of the devised questionnaire, the preliminary questionnaire was pilot-tested by the research assistant in Thailand during March 1983. The pilot-testing helped the researcher determine the adequacy of wording, sequencing, timing, and also relevance of obtained data to the study. For this purpose, 10 students residing in Nakornsawan were selected. After the pilot-testing, it was found that students spent about 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaire and had very few problems in understanding the question. Item #18 which led to ambiguity for some students was later revised.

2. The Preparation of Interview Topics. As mentioned earlier, the in-depth interview was used as an instrument to (1) validate responses obtained on the questionnaire and (2) to derive additional, more detailed information concerning students' perceptions regarding the value of distance learning programs offered by the STOU. It is also hoped that through the interview the researcher could discover some unanticipated experiences and knowledge students obtained in being STOU students as well as to discover weakness of the program and derive suggestions for improvement. In other words, the in-depth interview led to a better understanding of the students' life-world and hopefully more accurate interpretation of questionnaire

data.

In order to pursue these ends, the researcher prepared interviewing topics which were pertinent to these areas: (1) students' objectives in attending STOU; (2) students' perceptions of the value of distance learning programs and experiences; (3) relevance of the program to their occupation and daily life; and (4) suggestions for improvement. Along with these topics, the researcher prepared some guiding questions which were to be used in some interview situations. These guiding questions included: (1) what is it like to be an STOU student? (2) in general, what do you think about STOU programs? (3) why do you feel that way? (4) which activities do you prefer? (5) has being an STOU student changed your life-style in any way? (6) is there any advantage to being an STOU student? and (7) is there any disadvantage to being a student at STOU? These guiding questions were used appropriately and according to the interview situation. In all cases, the informant responses led to other questions, and the researcher pursued those which were interesting and relevant to the purpose of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodological procedures undertaken in this study include: (1) permission to conduct the research; (2) the identification of the research sample; (3) the collection of data; and (4) the treatment and analysis of data.

Permission to Conduct the Research. The researcher asked the Director-General of the Department of Teacher Education (who is the researcher's former superior) to request permission to conduct the research from the President of the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in April, 1983. The permission was granted in the same month and the Office of the Registrar of the university was asked to produce addresses of students who were to be involved in the research. These groups of students refer to those who reside in Bangkok and Nakornsawan only. Along with the addresses, the Registrar hinted that the collection of questionnaire data by mailing could lead to low rate of return. He further suggested that the researcher should collect questionnaire data on May 7-8, 1983 which were the final dates for the final exam of most students. The registrar would ask final exam supervisors to assist in administering the questionnaire. The registrar's suggestion was adopted. The researcher was only to select identification numbers of sampled students, to give these

numbers to the final exam supervisors, and to send in a research assistant to deliver and collect the questionnaire.

The Identification of the Research Sample. After receiving the list of names, identification numbers, and addresses of research participants, the identification of the sample was conducted.

The identification of research participants in Bangkok. The students who resided in Bangkok were supposed to take final exams at any of these four centers: Pranakorn Teachers' College for students who enrolled in the School of Education; Amnuaysin School, Sri-Ayudhaya School, or Santirat School for students who enrolled in the School of Management Science. The researcher randomly sampled research participants based on identification numbers which were sequential. The research sample was selected from every 16th student enrolling in the first-year program in the School of Education. Every 65th student was selected from the group of second-year students who were enrolled in the School of Education. In the School of Management Science, the researcher selected every 173rd and 53rd enrolled in the first and the second-year program respectively. The choice of 16th, 65th, 173rd, and 53rd was arrived at by dividing the total number of students (562, 2272, 6061, 1868) registered by 80, the chosen size of each

sample. By employing this random sampling technique, the researcher got 320 research respondents in Bangkok, 160 of them were education students and another 160 of them management science students.

The identification of research participants in Nakornsawan. The identification of the research sample in Nakornsawan was done similarly to the method employed in Bangkok. In the education program, every fifth student out of a total of 200 in the first year and every 20th out of a total of 766 in the second year were selected as samples of this study respectively. All students (35) enrolling in the second year of management science were selected. Every fourth students out of a total of 140 in the first year of management science was selected. By employing this method, the researcher identified 70 samples from the School of Education and another 70 from the School of Management Science.

The identification of interview informants was done differently. The researcher approached STOU students by phone and in some cases in person and asked them if they were happy to participate in the interview. Through this means, the researcher was able to identify 13 students (four of them were dropouts) as interview informants. In addition, each informant represented a different group of students.

The Collection of Data.

1. The Collection of Questionnaire Data. After identifying the sample, the researcher decided to administer the questionnaire on the final date of the final exam of each sample (May 7-8, 1983). The final exam supervisor provided full assistance to the researcher in the administration of the questionnaire. In addition, the research assisstants assisted in the delivery and the collection of the questionnaire from each center on the final exam date. In Bangkok, of the 320 sets of questionnaire administered, the researcher got 268 returns which was 83.75% of the total research sample. Following the same procedure, the researcher got 120 returns from Nakornsawan center, which was 85.71% of the total research sample.

2. The Collection of Interview Data. The appointment for interviews was done by phone and in person. After some discussion, each informant was asked to specify time and locations most convenient for him to have the interview. Most informants chose their own offices or homes as the location for the interview. An interview took about one to two hours and each informant was interviewed two to three times, depending upon sufficiency and clarity of the data received (See Interview Schedule in Appendix B).

The interview began with a short, general discussion which could lead to familiarity and friendliness. After such an atmosphere was developed, the researcher explained to the informant the purpose and the scope of the interview, then asked for permission to tape record the interview and to publish his name in the final report. The first question was very general in nature. The informant was asked to comment on general experiences gained from the STOU program. Questions such as "what is it like to be an STOU student?" was given to most informants. Answers of informants in most cases led to further questions. Wherever ambiguity arose, an explanation by the researcher was provided. At the end of each interview, an appointment for the next interview was made (See an Example of Transcription of Individual Interview in Appendix C).

During the interview, the researcher jotted down some of the main points of the interview as well as unclear answers. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the audiotape and prepared topics for the subsequent interview. In each subsequent interview the researcher summarized the discussion from and the interpretation of the previous interview and asked the informant to validate the account. Then another interview session took place (See an Example of Account of Individual Interview in Appendix D).

The Treatment and Analysis of Data.

1. Questionnaire Data. Numerical data from the completed questionnaires were coded on data processing cards for computer analysis. The distribution of data on each item was determined by frequencies and percentage. Chi-square was used to determine the significance of the relationships between and among personal and social circumstances and the perception of distance learning programs.

Responses to open-ended questions were scrutinized carefully and were used to illuminate the perception expressed in numerical form from each item.

2. Interview Accounts. As was mentioned earlier, interview topics prepared were pertinent to these areas: (1) students' objectives in attending STOU; (2) students' perceptions of the value of the distance learning programs and experiences; (3) relevance of the program to their present occupation and daily life; and (4) suggestions for improvement. In addition, there were a number of sub-questions which were pursued following the guiding questions. The researcher reviewed and summarized responses to each question carefully then aggregated to items which were included in the questionnaire. Responses which could not be aggregated were summarized separately. They were used to uncover areas which were not touched upon by the

questionnaire.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher has discussed sources of data, research instruments, and research methodological procedures. In order to be able to answer the research question which aims at determining the students' perceptions of the distance learning programs and experiences at STOU, the researcher selected samples from two locations: Bangkok and Nakornsawan. The 320 students who resided in Bangkok were selected as representatives of urban students who because of their location have greater access to services provided by the university while the 140 students who reside in Nakornsawan were selected as representatives of rural students. Seven and six interview informants were selected from Bangkok and Nakornsawan respectively. Each informant represented each category of students: first-year education students; second- year education students; dropouts from the School of Education; first-year management science students; second-year management science students; dropouts from the School of Management Science. In order to obtain deep and wide data relevant to the study, the questionnaire and the in-depth interview were administered and conducted. Data received through the questionnaire were treated as principal while interview accounts were considered as supplementary

data.

After permission was granted, the researcher identified research samples and began to conduct in-depth interviews and administer questionnaires. Questionnaire data were analyzed by computer while interview accounts were scrutinized and summarized by the researcher, then aggregated to topics which were already included in the questionnaire. Details of the analysis of data and the presentation of findings follow.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to explore the students' experience of distance learning programs, to examine the value of distance learning programs as perceived by students, and to suggest some possible strategies for improvement of distance learning programs. In other words, this chapter provides answers to research questions as stated in Chapter I.

To make the presentation of the findings more readable, this chapter is therefore divided into four sections.

Section I: How students experience distance learning programs at STOU.

Section II: How students perceive some aspects of the distance learning experience as contributing to or hindering their learning.

Section III: The relationship between students' perceptions (discussed partly in Section II) and personal and social circumstances.

Section IV: Students' suggestions for the improvement of the present program of the STOU.

In addition, findings and interpretation regarding each section are presented as follow:

1. Findings derived from questionnaire data are tabulated

and interpreted.

2. Interview data were scrutinized and supplemented to findings derived from the questionnaire data.

Further, in order to provide bases for the discussion of the research findings, the following personal and social circumstances of STOU's students are presented:

1. The faculty in which the students enrolled;
2. Years at the university;
3. The number of courses completed;
4. The location of students (urban or rural);
5. Sex;
6. Age;
7. Educational backgrounds;
8. Students' occupation;
9. Students' income;
10. The average working hours of employed students;
11. Sources of financial support;
12. Reasons for attending STOU.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DERIVED FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE OF STOU STUDENTS

The questionnaire data were secured from 388 students whose personal data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Personal Data of Questionnaire Respondents.

Items	Frequency	%
Sex		
male	239	61.6
female	149	38.4
Age of sample		
under 23	13	3.4
23- 32	254	65.5
33- 42	98	25.3
over 43	23	5.9
Present Address		
Bangkok	267	68.8
Nakornsawan	121	31.2
Faculty Attended		
Education	196	50.5
Mangement Science	192	49.5
Years of Attendance		
First year	200	51.5
Second year	188	48.5

(Cont.)

Table 3 (Cont.)

Items	Frequency	%
The Number of Courses completed		
None	19	4.9
1-3 Courses	197	50.8
4-6 Courses	48	12.4
7-9 Courses	120	30.9
10-12 Courses	4	1.0
Educational Backgrounds		
Diploma in Vocation	141	36.3
Diploma in Vocation Equivalent	18	4.6
Diploma in Education	134	34.5
Diploma in Education Equivalent	20	5.2
Other	75	19.3
Principle Occupation		
Self-employed	9	2.3
Government Employee	277	71.4
Private Organization Employee	84	21.6
Unemployed	4	1.0
Others (Buddhist monk and UN employee)	14	3.6

(Cont.)

Table 3 (Cont.)

Items	Frequency	%
Sources of Financial Support*		
Self-support	364	93.8
Spouse	35	9.0
Parents	38	9.8
Relatives	4	1.0
Others	2	0.5
Monthly Income		
Less Than CDN$ 50	2	0.5
Between CDN$ 50- 100	13	3.4
Between CDN$ 101- 150	109	28.5
Between CDN$ 151- 200	120	31.3
More Than CDN$ 200	139	36.3
The Average Number of Working Hours Per Week		
40 Hours or Less	178	46.5
41- 50 Hours	142	37.1
51- 60 Hours	47	12.3
More Than 60 Hours	16	4.2

(Cont.)

Table 3 (Cont.)

Items	Frequency	%
Reasons For Attending the STOU*		
To Improve Job Opportunity	192	49.5
To Improve Social Status	171	44.1
Personal Enrichment	302	77.8
For Degree	147	37.9
Other	9	2.3

* Students may choose more than one item.

Of the total respondents, 50.5% enrolled in the Faculty of Education while 49.5% were enrolled in the Faculty of Management Science. The table shows that 51.5% of the respondents are first year students and 48.5% are second year students while 50.8% completed 1-3 academic courses and only 30.9% completed 7-9 academic courses.

Regarding locations and sex of the respondents, the table shows that 68.8% of the questionnaire respondents resided in Bangkok (urban area) and that 31.2% resided in Nakornsawan (rural area). The majority of the respondents, 61.6%, were male and only 38.4% were female.

In the area of age and educational background, the reasearcher found that the majority of students were older than those of the conventional university students. Only 3.4% of the students were under 23 while 65.5% were between 23-32. Most students held similar educational backgrounds. The table shows that 36.3% held undergraduate diploma in vocational education while 34.5% held undergraduate diploma in teaher education. The remaining, 29.1%, held Master's degree, Bachelor's degree, or undergraduate diploma equivalent.

In term of occupation and income, the majority of students were employed people. Only 1% of the respondents were unemployed. Of the employed respondents, 71.4% were government employees while 21.6% and 2.3% were private organization employees and self-employed respectively. The remaining 3.6% were categorized in the "other" category. Most employed students, 67.6%, earned more than CDN$ 166 per month, which is higher than the beginning salary of the Bachelor's degree holder. The starting salary of the Bachelor's degree holder is approximately CDN$ 150 per month (The Civil Servant Salary Schedule,1983). Only 3.9% earned CDN$ 100 per month or less.

Regarding the number of regular working hours in addition to study hours, 46.5% worked 40 hours per week or less while the remaining 37.1%, 12.3%, and 4.2% worked

41-50, 51-60, and more than 60 hours per week respectively.

With respect to sources of financial support, the majority of students, 93.8%, supported themselves. The remaining 5.7% were supported by parents, spouse, or relatives. Only 0.5% were supported by their employer.

Students cited more than one reason for attending the STOU. "Personal enrichment" was the most popular since it was cited by 77.8% of the total respondents. "To improve job opportunities (49.5%)," "To improve social status(44.1%)," and "To receive an STOU degree (37.9%)" were also cited as reasons. Only 2.3% cited "For the good reputation of the family" and "For the improvement of present work" as reasons for attending the STOU.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DERIVED FROM INTERVIEW DATA OF STOU STUDENTS

Interview informants of this study had similar characteristics to those of the questionnare respondents. All research informants were employed. Of the total informants (13), six were teachers, four were public enterprise employees, two were private organization employees, and one was self-employed.

Regarding working hours, most informants worked about 40 hours per week. Some were engaged occasionally in extra work about 10-20 hours in addition to the regular hours.

Those who worked with the public enterprise explained that they could find some spare time during working hours to do some study. But teachers, private organization employees, and the self-employed could hardly find spare time during office hours to do their own study.

With regard to student's income, the informants earned a higher salary than that of the starting salary of the bachelor's degree holder with the exception of one individual who began her present job earning less than the standard starting salary. Many sought extra jobs so they could earn more. Students of the Faculty of Management Science earn more than students of the Faculty of Education, since most of them work with the public enterprise or commercial banks. One informant of the Faculty of Management Science is a businessman.

In the area of financial support, the majority of informants were self-supporting. They have few financial problems. Those who have financial problems requested support from their parents or their spouse.

With respect to educational background, most informants held similar educational background. Eleven held the undergraduate diploma in vocational or teacher education. One held a Master's degree in education while the remaining one held a bachelor's degree in engineering.

With regard to economic and social status, most informants were classified as lower-middle class persons. They were happy with their present job but were not satisfied with their status as compared with some other colleagues in their organization. Some felt that they were less highly regarded by their colleagues, especially when compared with the one who held a college or university degree. Suteep's feeling illustrates the situation.

> In my school, the number of teachers with degrees increases every year. I feel that I am inferior as compared with others since I held an undergraduate diploma in teacher education only. In the staff meeting, I raised suggestions but they are not regarded. The suggestion made by the junior teacher who held the degree was more recognized. This forces me to struggle for the degree.

Regarding home environments, nine of the thirteen informants were married and seven of these informants had children whose ages range from four months to six years. Two of them had children who were between eight to fourteen years of age. The spouses of most informants held similar academic backgrounds and both the spouses and the informants were working to support the family. There were only four informants whose spouses held higher academic backgrounds.

With regard to dwellings, some informants had their own houses; some live in government subsidized-housing; some lived with their parents; and some lived in the dormitory. Those who lived with their parents had some other brothers

or sisters to accompany them. Family members of informants strongly encouraged the informant to complete their degrees. Some family members assisted the informant in doing house hold chores to enable the informant to devote more time to her studies. In addition to this assistance, good understanding provided by the spouse and children was another factor that motivated the informant to struggle to complete the program. In the interview, Jirawan said that her six-year-old son would play quietly when he knew that his mother was studying. Similarly, Suteep's son would turn on the television and remind his mother to watch the television program when the STOU program was aired. In occasions, Suteep's husband and children watched the STOU program and discussed it with her when the program was over. Whenever Suteep passed the exam, the family members congratulated her and organized a celebration for her. The congratulations and the celebration given by the family members were key factors that motivated the informant to strive for success. In addition to motivation received from family members, some received motivation from parents, colleagues, friends, and their superiors. Good understanding and encouragement provided by parents, colleagues, friends, and superiors were good motivators of informants's learning.

Regarding reasons for attending the STOU, most informants cited these similar reasons: (1) unhappy with the present position, (2) poor acceptance by colleagues, and (3) little opportunity for job mobility. Most informants believed that the degree awarded by the STOU should increase their social mobility. The knowledge gained would help the informant perform their office duties more effectively. Importantly, the informants believed that the degree would help them gain more acceptance from their colleagues and relatives. In the interview, Winai explained:

> If I have a degree as other relatives do, the whole family will gain more acceptance. In addition, I will have as great opportunity concerning job mobility as some other colleagues who have a degree will. Further, the STOU degree shall be considered as a good starting for other higher degrees.

Similar to Winai's explanation, Aew cited reasons for attending the STOU as:

> If there is opportunity of success, I would like to pursue in it (this study). My parents want to see me having a degree. My cousin (my uncle's daughter) who lives next door to my parents holds a degree. My uncle many times mentioned the academic competence of his daughter to my parents...

Winai's and Aew's explanation should reflect another reason for attending the STOU of some students.

In addition to the reasons mentioned, some informants cited the following as reasons for attending the STOU: to gain more knowledge; to use one's leisure time; to improve one's own standard of living; they were interested in the

program; and the program was convenient for employed students.

In the interview, it was also found that some students did not have their own reasons for attending the STOU. Some only wanted to experience this type of learning and some were persuaded to attend by the spouse. These aimless students could encounter the problem of fatigue or exhaustion.

According to data received from the questionnaire and interview, STOU students were older than students of the conventional university. Most are employed and earn more than the starting salary of the bachelor's degree holder. Many are married and have many family commitments in addition to office responsibilities. Most students were between 23-32 years of age and were anxious to improve their social status and job opportunities. When asked what encouraged them to continue their education in the STOU program, many explained that good understanding and encouragement of spouse, colleagues, friends, parents, dependents, and superiors were among the key motivators.

The personal data presented should be sufficient for the discussion of findings regarding students' experience of distance learning program at STOU, students' perceptions of the distance learning programs, the relationship between students' personal and social circumstances and students'

perceptions, and suggestions for the improvement of the present programs in the upcoming sections.

SECTION I: HOW STUDENTS EXPERIENCE DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS AT STOU

The students' experience of the distance learning programs presented in this section includes the following:

1. The average number of study hours per week;
2. The delivery time of instructional material;
3. The accessibility to STOU service equipment;
4. The degree of accessibility to instructional media;
5. The order of the use of the instructional media.

Findings derived from the questionnaire are presented first; these are then supplemented by findings derived from the interviews.

FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Average Number of Study Hours. Table 4 indicates that 50.8% of the total respondents spent 5 hours per week or less on each course. The remaining, 36.1%, 9.5%, 1.5%, and 2.1% spent 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and more than 20 hours per week respectively on each course.

Table 4: The Average Number of Study Hours Per Week on Each Course of STOU Students.

Items	Frequency	%
Less than 5 hours	197	50.8
6- 10 hours	140	36.1
11- 15 hours	37	9.5
16- 20 hours	6	1.5
More than 20 hours	8	2.1
Total	388	100.0

The Delivery Time of Instructional Materials. Table 5 shows that most students had problems due to the delay in the delivery of instructional materials. The majority of respondents, 70.5%, did not receive instructional materials on the scheduled time, while 29.5% received instructional materials on time.

Table 5: The Delivery Time of Instructional Materials.

Items	Frequency	%
On time	114	29.5
Late	272	70.5
Total	386	100.0

Accessibility of Instructional Equipment. STOU employs the multi-media approach. A number of media, e.g., TV sets, Radio sets, and tape recorders are introduced in this approach. Table 6 below reveals that the majority of students, 64.7%, 64.2%, and 62.1% reported that they could easily gain access to tape recorders, TV sets, and radio sets respectively.

Table 6: Accessibility to Instructional Equipment.*

Items	Frequency	%
TV Set	249	64.2
Radio Set	241	62.1
Tape Recorder	251	64.7

* Respondents could choose more than one item.

The Degree of Accessibility of Instructional Media. Table 7 indicates that the majority of respondents had difficulties in using instructional media and services provided by the university. Of the total sample, 76.0% responded that they had no access to their local study center. The table also shows that 49.5%, 39.9%, and 35.1% had some difficulties in gaining access to TV programs, radio programs, and tutorial sessions.

Table 7: The Degree of Accessibility to Instructional Media.

Instructional Media		Level of Accessibility			
		Very Easy	Easy	Rather Difficult	Impossible
TV Programs	(N)	36	130	192	30
	(%)	9.3	33.5	49.5	7.7
Radio Programs	(N)	48	114	115	71
	(%)	12.4	29.4	39.9	18.3
Tutorial Sessions	(N)	52	93	136	107
	(%)	13.4	24.0	35.1	27.6
Local Study Center	(N)	10	38	48	292
	(%)	2.6	9.8	12.4	75.3
Counselling Sevices	(N)	6	34	53	295
	(%)	1.5	8.8	13.7	76.0

The Order of the Use of Instructional Media. Students tended to use the media that were easily accessible. Table 8 and figure 2 show that the majority of the respondents, 78.9%, ranked textbooks as the most used while only 0.6% ranked radio programs as the most used media.

As for 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th, no other single media emerged as clearly as textbooks. However in order of preference by the largest proportion of respondents, the remaining media were ranked as follow: study guides were ranked second, audiotapes were ranked third; television was ranked fourth; radio programs were ranked fifth; and tutorial sessions were ranked sixth.

Table 8: Ranking Order of The Use of Instructional Media

Instructional Media		Order of Use					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Study Guide	(N)	57	101	54	43	49	65
	(%)	15.4	27.4	14.6	11.7	13.3	17.6
Tutorial Sessions	(N)	9	37	38	57	82	139
	(%)	2.5	10.2	10.5	15.7	22.7	28.4
TV Programs	(N)	9	61	94	95	75	35
	(%)	2.4	16.5	25.5	25.7	20.3	9.5
Textbooks	(N)	306	60	11	5	4	2
	(%)	78.9	15.5	2.8	1.3	1.0	0.5
Radio Programs	(N)	2	33	69	89	84	78
	(%)	0.6	9.3	19.4	25.1	23.7	22.0
Audiotape	(N)	4	96	115	81	57	21
	(%)	1.1	25.7	30.7	21.7	15.2	5.6

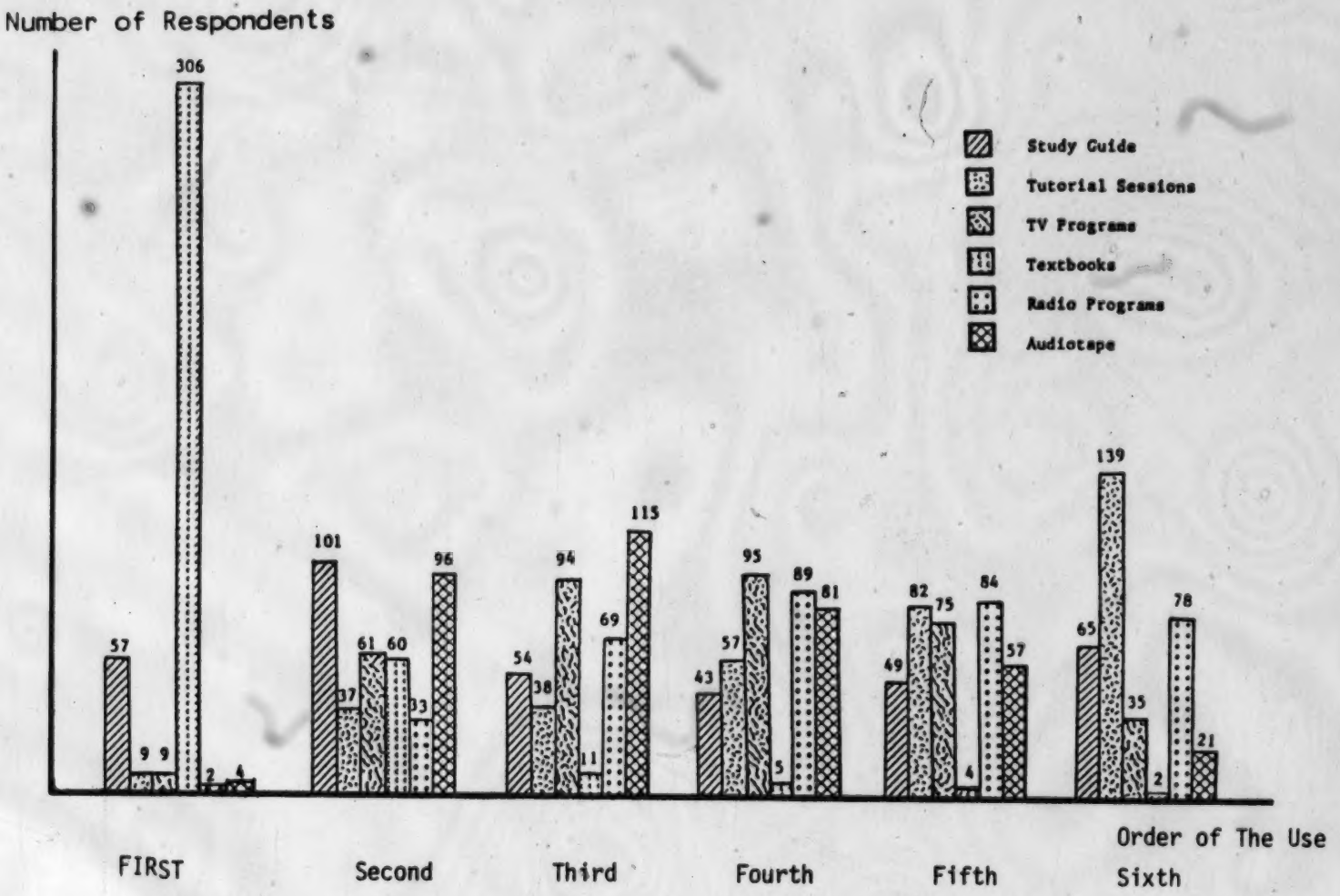

Figure 2: Order of The Use of Instructional Media

FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Findings derived from interview accounts concerning the students' experience on distance learning programs are presented under these headings: (1) students' learning strategies and (2) students' modes of learning.

Students' Learning Strategies. Certain major points emerged from the interviews in relation to the informants' learning strategies. A number of students utilized their regular office hours to do their studying while others studied before and/or after work. This type of studying usually took up an hour and a half to three hours a day, although a few indicated they did spend up to five hours of study a day. Illustrative of these are the following students: Winai spent about three to five hours a day while Suteep explained that she devoted all her spare time to studying. Using a different strategy, Aew, who has a seven-month-old daughter and has to be responsible for house-keeping, explained that she preferred to do her study in the month prior to the examination date otherwise she would forget what she learned at the beginning of the session. In this hectic month, her mother would take care of the child so that Aew could devote her time to the study. Some of them, Mant and Wirot, preferred to use two weeks prior to the examination date to prepare themselves for the

exam.

Concerning study habits, the interview accounts suggested that there were some students who worked diligently on their lessons as early in the course as possible until the final examination date. However a number stated that they did procrastinate doing their lessons and had to cram for a week or two prior to the final examinations. There are also various ways in which students organized their course study schedules. For example those who enrolled in 3 courses assigned certain days such as Monday and Tuesday to study a specific course and devoted Wednesday through Saturday to studying the two other courses. Flexibility in this type of study schedule occurred quite often from student to student.

It can also be noted that the informants preferred various locations to do their studying, either at the office, at home, out in the fields or at the beach. In the case of Chalermchai for instance, he says that:

> The office is more convenient. I have a private and air conditioned office which facilitates learning. Normally, I divided my texts into two sets. The more difficult to understand one will be kept in the office and the easier one will be kept at home which is a very noisy place. I sometimes have to babysit my children. Whenever they cry, I need to stop my reading and be with them. In short, I have more concentration at the office.

Suchart on the other hand chose to do his studying at home in a rather unique location:

> On holidays, most family members stay home. My children enjoy playing with me and I cannot do my study even in the quiet corner of the house. I therefore prefer to use my private wash room which is also designed specifically by myself for this purpose. When I am in the washroom, nobody bothers me.

With some other informants, their study location was not of prime consideration but rather the key element to success was concentration. Typical of this situation is Suteep's response during the interview.

> The huge text makes me bored. I spent all of my effort to finish it. Even when I visited my parents, I brought this text with me. I read it until I feel sleepy. But whenever I wake up, I read it again. I live with my text all day long. Whenever I feel bored, I chat with my husband and children for a while then I begin to read again.... No one shall succeed if he has no real intention.

With respect to their plans for graduation the informants who were in the two-year program were allowed a two- to six-year period to fulfill all requirements for the degree. However, a majority of the informants expressed the desire to complete the program within two years. In order to accomplish their goal, most informants were registered in three courses. In spite of this full load the informants believed that they still had adequate chance of passing the courses owing to the following: (a) first, the informants believed that passing the final exams was partly due to luck; (b) second, in cases where a student failed on examination, a supplementary exam was provided. The informants who registered for less than three courses were

those who were not quite sure about their own venture in the program. The current registration was considered only as a trial. If they were happy with the program, they would register for more courses in subsequent sessions.

Students' Mode of Learning. Informants used textbooks as a main medium for studying at STOU. Most informants agreed that the precise understanding of disciplines which appeared in the textbook was the key factor that determined success of students in the distance learning system. In addition to textbooks, most informants used audiocassettes, TV programs, radio programs, and tutorial sessions as supplementary media. However, the frequency of usage of these supplementary media varied from person to person. To illustrate means of learning of STOU students, different modes of learning are presented.

1. **Learning through printed materials.** The printed materials used by STOU students include textbooks and exercises. The researcher found that most informants used textbooks along with exercises. Many informants began their lessons by reading lesson plans, writing a pretest, studying a unit in the text, doing exercises, writing a post-test, and making a short note of the unit. Some finished all units of the course before moving to another course. Some finished a single unit of the course then shifted to another unit of another different course. Some students did not

follow directions included in the handbook. For instance, Wilai explained that she had never done a pretest since she believed that such an exercise was a waste of time. She further added that the subject was new to her therefore it was useless to do what she did not know about. Wilai began her lesson by skimming the whole text then reviewing lesson by lesson while making notes. After this review, Wilai normally completed the exercise and wrote the post-test.

Slightly different mode was used by an informant named Jirawan. She began her lesson by reading the whole text carefully. After finishing reading, Jirawan normally did the exercise, wrote the post-test, and at the same time used keys to the exercise and post-test attached to verify her performance. The writing of exercise and post-test and the study of keys to exercise and post-test helped Jirawan learn the subject matter better.

Another student, Mant, approached exam preparation more systematically. Rather than studying all topics extensively, Mant paid close attention to only those topics that he felt would be covered on the final exam. This tactic helped him finish the text faster.

2. **Learning through audiocassettes.** The audiocassette summarizes the course content discussed in the text. The informant used audiocassettes right after finishing each unit. Some informants read their own notes derived from the

textbook while listening to the audiocassette so that they could compare their own notes with that of the audiocassette. The audiocassette helped informants make a counter check of what they had learned. If the informant noticed some contradictions, he would verify the discrepancy before proceeding to the next unit. In some cases, a few students record their own brief notes on the audiocassette and used these new cassettes along with the STOU cassette during the final exam period. Further to these, some informants indicated that other members of their family also availed theselves of the learning opportunity provided by these audiocasettes. Thus it has not been uncommon for a spouse and children to listen to the tape along with the student.

3. **Learning through broadcasting.** Most informants rarely used TV and radio programs as a means of learning. There were a few who used broadcasting in the first term but not in the second term. The reasons cited by most informants were: (1) the broadcasting time was inconvenient for them; (2) the quality of broadcasting was poor, especially the quality of sound and picture; and (3) the informants did not perceive the necessity of using them. Some informants claimed that some of the radio programs were not related to the final exam questions thus did not help them pass the exam. Of the thirteen informants, only one

watched the STOU program regularly. One informant who did not own a TV set, was largely limited to rare occasions when she could watch the TV program in the dormitory lounge. For those who watched the program, many neglected to follow the TV guide which suggested that students finish a unit before watching the program on such a unit. The informant, Winai, experienced some problems in using the TV program and he explained that "the university tells us to read the textbook before watching the program but in fact it is impossible since sometimes the textbook does not come at the time when the program is being aired". Winai further added that the only thing he could do was to take down notes while watching the TV program and later compare it to the textbook. The delay in the mailing of the textbooks caused a great deal of inconvenience to most informants.

4. Learning through tutorial sessions. Most of the informants attended the tutorial session once and did not come to the subsequent sessions. They cited different reasons for this namely: (a) first the inconvenience of having to travel from residence to the tutorial center; (b) at these tutorial sessions, some of the informants did not know each other, thus the majority of them felt rather lonely; (c) a number of informants could not find sufficient time to prepare their lessons prior to the tutorial sessions. Consequently these students felt intimidated

rather than helped by the tutorial sessions.

The interview account also revealed that students who had learning problems encountered some difficulties in seeking counsel. Although the university provides counselling services, the students did not know how and where to receive it. Of the thirteen informants, only one attempted to seek counsel from the university and he was unsuccessful. Winai explained that:

> I phoned the university many times but every time I phoned the line was busy therefore I no longer seek counsel or advice from the university in spite of having several questions to be asked.

In summary, the findings derived from the interview were similar to that of the questionnaire data. More specifically both the interview accounts and the data from the questionnaire indicate two significant points. One, the majority of the informants expected the various media (i.e, audiocassettes, the TV program, the radio program, the tutorial session) to be particularly relevant to the final exams and furthermore that the passing of the final exam was more crucial and expedient factor in their studies.

SECTION II: HOW STUDENTS PERCEIVE SOME ASPECTS OF THE DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE AS CONTRIBUTORS OR HINDRANCES TO THEIR LEARNING

Findings derived from the research cover the following headings:

a. The value and the effectiveness of instructional media and services;

b. Difficulties in studying at STOU; and

c. The most difficulty in studying at STOU.

FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Value and The Effectiveness of Instructional Media and Services. Table 9 shows that the majority of respondents asserted that textbooks, study guides, examinations, audiocassettes, communication by mail, TV programs, radio programs, and tutorial services were useful to their learning. Of the total respondents, 96.6% indicate that textbooks were useful (69.3% indicated that the textbooks were very useful while 27.3% indicated that the textbooks were useful). The majority of students were not certain if course counselling, summer school, and program counselling did any thing good for them (82.2%, 79.9%, and 78.6% were uncertain about course counselling, summer school, and program counselling respectively). Lastly, a small

percentage of the respondents perceived that the instructional media and services provided by the university were useless or impeded their learning.

Table 9: The Value and the Effectiveness of Instructional Media and Services.

Media and Services		Impede	Useless	Useful	Very Useful	No Idea
Textbooks	(N)	12	0	106	269	1
	(%)	3.1	0	27.3	69.3	0.3
Study Guide	(N)	5	2	229	111	41
	(%)	1.3	.5	59.0	28.6	10.6
Radio Programs	(N	10	14	185	49	130
	(%)	2.6	3.6	47.7	12.6	33.5
TV Programs	(N)	8	9	222	85	64
	(%)	2.1	2.3	57.2	21.9	16.5
Audiocassette	(N)	0	18	214	118	38
	(%)	0	4.6	55.2	30.4	9.8

(Cont.)

Table 9 (Cont.)

Media and Services		Impede	Useless	Useful	Very Useful	No Idea
Assignment	(N)	9	11	96	31	241
	(%)	2.3	2.8	24.7	8.0	62.1
Examination	(N)	22	7	141	196	22
	(%)	5.7	1.8	36.3	50.5	5.7
Tutorial	(N)	7	9	146	87	139
Services	(%)	1.8	2.3	37.6	22.4	35.8
Communication	(N)	22	4	182	136	44
by Mail	(%)	5.7	1.0	46.9	35.1	11.3
Summer School	(N)	2	4	50	22	310
	(%)	0.5	1.0	12.9	5.7	79.9
Program	(N)	4	7	57	15	305
Counselling	(%)	1.0	1.8	14.7	3.9	78.6
Course	(N)	1	7	43	18	319
Counselling	(%)	0.3	1.8	11.1	4.6	82.2

Difficulties in Studying at STOU. Table 10 indicates that lack of time, lack of personal contact with tutors, and work pressure were factors that cause learning difficulties of most students (54.4%, 52.1%, and 51.0% responded that lack of time, lack of personal contact with tutors, and work pressure, espectively, hindered their learning). Some respondents, 30.5%, perceived the lack of "self-discipline" as hindrance of their success. The minority of respondents perceived course difficulty, financial problems, and lack of contact with other students as hindrances of their learning (17.8%, 18.8%, and 19.1% respectively). Only 6.2% of the respondents cited reading problems and the delay in the delivery of instructional media as their learning impediments.

Table 10: Difficulties in Studying at STOU*

Items	Frequency	%
Lack of time	211	54.4
Lack of personal contact with tutor	202	52.1
Work pressures and responsibilities	198	51.1
Lack of self-discipline	118	30.5
Domestic interruption and demands	90	23.2
Lack of contact with other students	74	19.1
Financial problems	73	18.8
Course is too difficult to understand	69	17.8
Other**	24	6.2

* Respondents could choose more than one item.

**Other includes delay of delivery of instructional materials, mail communication, and reading habits.

Greatest Difficulties in Studying at STOU.

Questionnaire respondents were asked to select the most difficult factor for them to deal with in the study at STOU. The result, shown in Table 11, indicated that 24.7% of the total respondent ranked "lack of time" as the most difficult factor for them to deal with. Next below the lack of time, "personal contact with tutors" was ranked as the most difficult factor to deal with by 19.5% of the respondents. Only 2.7% and 4.1% ranked "personal contact with other students" and "domestic interruption and demands" as the most difficult factor to deal with by the respondents respectively.

Table 11: Greatest Difficulties to Deal With in Studying at STOU.

Items	Frequency	%
Lack of time	91	24.7
Lack of personal contact with tutor	72	19.5
Work pressures and responsibilities	62	16.8
Lack of self-discipline	43	11.7
Financial problems	31	8.4
Course is too difficult to understand	27	7.3
Domestic interruption and demands	15	4.1
Lack of contact with other students	10	2.7
Other*	18	4.9

*Other includes delay of delivery of instructional materials and mail communication

FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The Advantages of The STOU Instructional System. Most informants agreed that the STOU instructional system is valuable to them. Through the distance teaching system employed students are able to complete a degree without having to quit their job. The STOU instructional system also offered employed students an alternative to attending the conventional university. Jirawan, an informant, mentioned advantages of this instructional system:

> I prefer the distance instructional system to the conventional system which is to me very boring. In the distance instructional system, students are more self-controlled. They progress at their own ability. They are not required to attend the class. They are not required to participate in extra activities but only in the one that is valuable for them. With this system, I shall direct my own success.

Another student, Suchart, asserted that the distance learning system was more challenging than the conventional one. Distance learners have more freedom in term of learning. "Above all", Suchart continued, "I like the evaluation method which relies totally on the final exam. I am not required to write a paper".

Suteep found that the distance learning system was more economical. She further explained:

> In each term, I am required to pay only CDN$ 80 for my tuition fees. These fees cover everthing such as textbooks, tutorial sessions, student guides, audiocassettes, academic exercises, and final exam. I am not required to pay for extra curriculum activities, uniforms, travel fares, handouts, and other training materials, which are necessary for those who attend the conventional university. I am not required to waste my time on travelling. Above all, I shall spend more time with my family. I shall share and use knowledge learned to improve the standard of living so do other family members who mostly watch the TV program and discuss with me after the program.

Although the distance instructional system is advantageous in many ways, informants also observed certain weaknesses in the present distance instructional system. Some informants were uncertain if experiences gained are comparable to what they would have gained if they had attended the conventional university. One major drawback in the distance instructional system was the fact that the students were not able to receive immediate feedback from the tutor. In cases when a student needed clarification on certain issues he was forced to wait for the next tutorial session which took place once a month. The interview account also showed other weaknesses. For example an informant encountered the feeling of loneliness. Sai-fon, an unmarried student expressed it thus:

> I do not know anybody else in the tutorial session. I do not know who I can exchange the idea with. I feel like I lack something. It is too lonely. I have to do everything by myself. I have to rely on myself. Especially, when I attend the tutorial session I know no one thus makes me embarrassed. I sometimes have questions to ask but am reluctant to do so. Most students are male and rather older than I am. I am

embarrassed to speak in the class.

Similar to what Sai-fon experienced, Wilai revealed:

> I like STOU textbooks. But I feel that I want more interactions with other students. This instructional system does not facilitate social interactions but individualism. I remember when I was at Chulalongkorn university, I have a lot of friends. We helped each other. Above all, I imitate teaching styles of my professors whom I impressed. This is very useful to my teaching job.

Responding negatively, Mant complains that he did not learn anything from the STOU program. Mant further illustrated that:

> I passed two courses in spite of spending only two weeks preparing myself for the whole exam. To me, I found the STOU program too easy, and disregardable. I quit the program because I was admitted to Prasanmitr (Srinakarin Wirote University). Here at Prasanmitr, I devote all my spare time to studying. Still, I did not get very good marks. If I had not spent this much effort, I would not have passed the Prasanmitr exam. I feel like I really learn something here but not at STOU. In addition, whenever I have a question, I shall discuss with my friends or professors.

Further, the researcher found that the distance learning system caused more difficulties for less competent students, especially those who have reading difficulties. Tong-yoo revealed that:

> I have difficulties with this type of learning. I have to interpret by myself, which is to me less effective. I prefer the conventional type of teaching and learning. I shall see the face of the teacher and also shall ask her when I found the lesson is unclear.

Contributions and Hindrances of Instructional Media and Services. The instructional media provided by the university are seen as being more or less useful to the

students' learning. Contributions and hindrances of each type of instructional media and service to students' learning are presented below.

Textbooks. Most informants perceived that textbooks were the most valuable medium in terms of helping them learn. Many believed that STOU textbooks were much better than those produced by other universities in term of accuracy, reliability, illustration, and publication standards. In addition, authors of STOU's textbooks were well known and highly recognized. Winai mentioned the superiority of STOU's textbooks below:

> STOU's textbooks are thorough, sequential, and logical. The language used is very readable and understandable. In most texts, examples, cases, and illustrations are supplemented. I read it (the textbook) once and I can understand it.

Similar to Winai's, Suchart mentioned the superiority of STOU's textbooks as:

> STOU's textbooks are superb. The content is thorough, clear-cut, and readable. If you have enough concentration, you shall get through it (the textbook) easily.

In addition, Suteep mentioned the superiority of STOU's textbooks over textbooks produced by other universities as:

> In addition to high standard of publishing, the STOU's textbooks are very applicable. I shall use these textbooks as a guide to improve my standard of teaching. They (textbooks) make me become more creative. Some of my colleagues borrowed textbooks from me, and they said the books were superb.

In general, textbooks are viewed as a valuable tool which contributes highly to STOU students' learning. However, some defects were also observed. Some informants complained that some authors' writing styles were awkward and repetitive. Some topics in the text were unclear and illogical. Some authors paid less attention to spelling, thus created the feeling of uncertainty among distance learners. Some observed some errors in keys to exercises and post-test. Wirot mentioned part of STOU textbooks' defects below:

> In general, STOU textbooks are good. But some texts are very difficult to follow, for example, an accouning text. I read it again and again, still I could not understand it. There are too many formulas and equations. Many times I have to leave it that way or sometimes I compile it for the tutor to explain to me, and many times I forget to clarify it with the tutor.

Other technical problems were encountered by the informants, such as the delay in the delivery of the textbooks. Wirot complained:

> I received textbooks on Business Law just one week before the exam. I had not enough time to read it. Therefore I read only the sections which were more likely to be asked in the examination. I was lucky that I passed it.

This delay in delivery of textbooks also caused several problems for distance learners. For instance, guides to the use of TV programs, radio programs, and tutorial sessions suggest that students read textbooks before listening, watching, or attending the tutoring but it was sometimes

impossible for students if they have not received the textbooks. Some informants could not avail themselves of supplementary media simply because they did not have the textbook to adequately prepare them for the broadcasting programs or tutorial sessions.

Audiocassette. Most informants perceived that the audiocassette tape was the second most valuable contributor to learning. Wirót expressed a typical viewpoint of many students when he said:

> The audiocassette summarizes main ideas of the textbook. The listening to the cassette helps provoke better understanding of the textbook. To me, the cassette helps me to memorize the course content.

However, many informants stated that they also experienced delay in the mailing of the tapes. Some spoke about the poor quality of the sound and at least one informant complained that she received a totally damaged audiocassette at a time close to the final exam date.

TV Programs. The use of TV programs by STOU students was very limited. Only a few perceived the value of the TV programs as an asset to their learning. Typical of each are the responses by Winai and Sai-fon.

> Winai: The contribution of TV programs to my learning is not as much as it should be. The insufficient number of programs can be considered as a factor lowering this contribution. For instance, of the 15-unit course, the university shall supplement only five 30-minute programs. The university integrates three units of the textbook into one TV program. What shall we expect from this 30-minute program?... Even

worse, some program covers only one unit of the textbook. However, in general, I found the program useful to me.

Sai-fon: At the beginning I did not have a TV set therefore I was only able to watch a few programs at the dormitory lounge. I found the program was very useful to me. It presents broad disciplines and stimulates my ideas. I hope I will watch more in the future.

On the other hand, many students agree with Wilai who says that:

At the beginning I watched a few programs. But later on I found that I was not interested in the program. I did not see close relations between the program and the textbook. In addition, I did not have much time to waste during the time waiting for the program to come. Therefore I now prefer textbooks to TV programs.

Still a few comments were similar to Suteep's viewpoint:

Sometime the picture is good but sometime not. I have transmission and receiving problems. If the weather is clear, I like to watch STOU program so do my husband and children. Especially, we like to watch the law program.

Radio Programs. Very few informants listened to STOU radio programs. Many explained that the broadcast time which is late at night is inconvenient for them in as much as they had to get up early for work in the morning. Some were disappointed with the TV program therefore were not encouraged to listen to the radio program. Some said that time was a major problem that kept them from listening to the university program. Winai, who has never listened to the university radio program, explains:

> I never listened to the radio program. I feel that I have already spent enough time reading textbooks therefore I do not think I need it. Further, I feel that it will be too much for me since I am already tired from work.

Concerned about the potential of the radio program, Chalermchai mentioned that he did not listen to the program because:

> I do not like listening to the university radio program. It has sound only. It is inferior to the TV program and textbook. Especially, in term of helping me pass the exam, the textbook is very superior....

Another respondent, Wirot, has this to say:

> I have a feeling that the radio program is inferior to the TV program. I therefore select the TV program. Further, I have to spend a lot of time reading the textbook therefore I do not have enough time left for the radio program.

In general, informants preferred textbooks and TV programs to radio programs. However, those who listened to the radio program regularly found the program contributed to their learning. For instance, Sai-fon mentioned the contribution of the program to her learning as:

> The program was related to disciplines in the text. It helps extend my understanding. I do not have difficulty concerning broadcasting time since the university mailed it to me at the beginning of the term. The only problem that sometimes causes inconvenience for me is that the program is broadcasted too late- the time when I am going to bed. Many times I could not stand for it.

Tutorial Sessions. There is consistent evidence from the interview accounts which points to the many informants' claim the tutorial session contribute a great deal to her

learning. Illustrative of this are the following accounts by the students:

> Winai: The tutorial session helped me correct my misunderstanding. I have opportunities to discuss academic subjects with the tutor. It brings me a feeling of being a student. This feeling reminds that I have extra responsibility to do- studying. Above all, I have opportunities to associate with other students.
>
> Suteep: I used to think that statistics was a difficult subject. I was about to withdraw from the course. But after attending tutorial session, I changed my mind. The tutor said in the class that the statistics was difficult subject and that only smart students could pass the exam. His statement made me have motivation. I want to be a smart student. I completed all exercises. I discussed with my husband wherever I could not understand it.
>
> Wirot: The principle of accounting is difficult for me. I tried to study and understand it myself but was unsuccessful. I attended the tutorial session, and the tutor explained it to me. Now I understand it. In addition, the tutor pointed out important points which were more likely to be asked in the final exam. For instance, the tutor told students about topics to be skipped over or to pay more attentions to.

In spite of the advantages mentioned in favor of the tutorial sessions, a few encountered some difficulties and still others found not much use for the sessions. Tong-yoo gave this reason:

> I attended once. I felt tired of travelling. The class was so crowd and the weather was very hot. I could not understand what the tutor said because I was exasperated. I felt like I was a dumb person. In that afternoon, I had to live on stimulant. I decided not to go attending tutorial session again.

Sai-fon, another informant, has this to say:

> The tutoring is only a summary of the textbook, where in fact I have already done it myself. I do not feel like I need it. I shall listen to the radio program which is also the summary of the textbook.

Silapachai, another informant, illustrates:

> I attended the tutorial session once. The tutor wanted students to raise questions but no one did it. He told us to prepare questions before attending the class. I did not have time to prepare the question therefore I decided not to attend it.

University-Student Communication. The very nature of distance learning where the bulk, if not all of the instructional processes take place by correspondence, presents a number of problematical issues. As previously mentioned, immediate communication or more specifically, face to face communication is not possible except in the tutorial sessions, summer sessions and the initial student orientation period. There were also difficulties which arose in the telephone and correspondence communication system set up by the university. Many pointed out the futile efforts spent in trying to contact the university. The complaints ranged from the university line being constantly busy, to not knowing axactly which office to contact. Postal communication was also delayed. A number of informants encountered such difficulties and identified the university-student communication as a major hindrance to their learning.

Counselling Services. Similar problems emerged in the aspect of counselling services. Most of the informants said

that they were not aware which office to contact when problem arise. Consequently, a great deal of decision-making (i.e. their program choice) was left to the students. This is elucidated on by Jirawan's statement:

> I was initially enrolled in the Faculty of Education when in fact I did not like education. I sought for counsel from the university but was unsuccessful. I spent one year in education and now I am waiting if I could get a transfer to the Faculty of Management Science. If I had continued in the Faculty of Education, I might have completed the program.

Student Evaluation Methods. Most informants were satisfied with the STOU evaluation method which is entirely based on one's performance in the final exam. They perceived that term papers or project works were inconvenient for them since they already have a lot of work responsibilities to do. Above all their success in these final exams gave them a sense of achievement and indeed made them feel proud.

With regard to the final exam question, most informants felt that the STOU's final exam questions were difficult to answer. All were the five-multiple choice format. But as compared to other types of questions (e.g.,essay type, fill in the correct answer, or a short description), the multiple choice format is more relaxing. Some informants said that even when they were in doubt they were able to guess the viable answer. Chalermchai explained his experience in writing the multiple choice exam below.

> I will do the easier one and skip the difficult one. After finishing all easy ones, I go back to do the difficult ones. This time I cross out choice by choice until there is only one single choice remaining. But if the elimination method does not help, I employ the guessing method.

In general, informants perceived that evaluation helped them learn more. The evaluation result told them how much they knew about the discipline.

The Summer School. Of the thirteen informants, only two experienced the summer school. Chalermchai talked about his experience at the summer school.

> The summer school is valuable in term of socialization. I get acquainted with some new friends and at the same time I have more opportunities to apply theories. My group made an instructional module during the summer school.

Suteep, another informant, described her experience at the summer school this way:

> I like the summer school. I get a lot of motivation from it. I participated in group dynamics, micro-teaching, and learning package production. I learn a lot through participating in these activities. I would like to attend the summer school organized by the university again.

Although the summer school was deemed by students as advantageous to their learning, they thought that the improper organization of this activity made the summer school less valuable. Chalermchai complained that the summer school was too crowded. The university did not provide sufficient materials and equipment for his group to work with. Suteep asserted that the summer school should

have been more valuable if she had received Guides to the summer school earlier.

Difficulties in Studying at STOU. There are two types of difficulties encountered by most informants: (1) the instructional system itself and (2) the students themselves.

1. Difficulties caused by the instructional system. Most informants believed that this instructional system isolated tutors from learners. Only some informants gained access to the instructor. Informants are required to rely on postal communication. Some informants tried to seek for counselling services but were unsuccessful. Some encountered the lack of information concerning the use of instructional materials. Most informants perceived that they could have learned and benefited more if these hindrances had been minimized.

2. Difficulties caused by personal circumstances. Most informants did not have enough time for studying. They complained that domestic works and office demands were two factors which were difficult to deal with. Some said that they were too tired from work so that they could not do much study while some of them encountered problems in self-discipline and lack of motivation. Of the thirteen informants, only one had financial problems.

In the interview, the researcher also found that all informants who dropped out experienced lack of motivation.

They do not see any benefit in being an STOU student. On the contrary, all non-dropout informants perceived benefits of being an STOU students.

SECTION III: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

In section I and II, the researcher presented findings concerning students experiences at STOU and the students' perceptions of the distance learning programs which are considered as contributors or hindrances to their learning. In this section, the researcher presents findings concerning (1) the values of distance learning programs; (2) the students' satisfaction with the program; and (3) the relationship between personal and social circumstances and students' perceptions.

FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Values of Distance Learning Programs. As revealed in Table 12 the majority of STOU students value STOU learning programs. Of the total respondents, 92.8% responded they learned a lot from the program. A high percentage, 65.7%, responded that the program helped increase their self-confidence. Many, 64.4%, responded that they could do better in dealing with problems such as personal, financial, and job problems. Only 0.3% responded that the program was not useful, while 8.2% asserted that they gained completely negative experience from the STOU. Some of them, 4.6%, responded in "other" category.

Table 12: The Value of Learning Experience at STOU

Items	Frequency	%
For the work I am doing, I learned a lot	358	92.3
It increases my self-confidence	255	65.7
I think I do better for some problems	250	64.4
It was a completely negative experience	32	8.2
No effect whatsoever	1	0.3
Other*	18	4.6

*Other includes self-prestige and improve social status.

The Degree of Satisfaction With the STOU Program.

Table 13 indicates that the majority of students were satisfied with their programs (47.8% were very satisfied while 47.5% were satisfied). Only 2.1% were unsatisfied while 2.6% were uncertain about their programs.

Table 13: The Degree of Student Satisfaction With Their Programs.

Items	Frequency	%
Very satisfied	185	47.8
Satisfied	184	47.5
Uncertain	10	2.6
Unsatisfied	5	1.3
Highly unsatisfied	3	0.8

The Relationship Between Personal and Social Circumstances and Students' Perceptions. There are twelve personal and social variables that might affect perceptions of STOU students. These include (1) faculty, (2) years at the university, (3) the number of courses done, (4) the location of students (urban or rural), (5) sex, (6) age, (7) educational backgrounds, (8) students' occupation, (9) students' income, (10) the average number of working hours, 11) sources of financial support, and (12) reasons for attending the STOU. In the presentation the researcher presents only statistical significant differences in perceptions of their own personal and social circumstances.

1. The Relationship Between Personal Variables and the Perceived Value of the Distance Learning Programs. Concerning the relationship between personal variables and the perceived value of distance learning program, the researcher found four types of STOU students' perceptions which are related significantly to personal variables. These are presented in Tables 14, 15, 16, and 17.

Table 14 shows that there was a significant relationship at the level beyond 0.05 between personal variable- faculty and the perceived value of the distance learning program- "I learned a lot" (Chi Square=4.129). Of the total respondents who were enrolled in the Faculty of Education, 89.3% perceived that they learned a lot from the program while 95.3% of the total respondents who were enrolled in the Faculty of Management Science perceived that they learned a lot from the program. In other words, the management science students valued their programs in term of helping them learn more than education students did.

Table 14: The Relationship Between The Faculty and the Perceived Value of the Program- "I Learned a Lot".

		I Learned A Lot		
		No	Yes	Row Total
Faculty	Education (N)	21	175	196
	(%)	10.7	89.3	50.5
	Management (N)	9	183	192
	Science (%)	4.7	95.3	49.5
	Total (N)	30	358	388
	(%)	7.7	92.3	100.00

Chi Square = 4.12941

df = 1

Significance = 0.0421

Table 15 shows that there is a significant relationship at level 0.01 between the reason for attending the STOU- "to improve social status" and the perceived value of the distance learning program- "the program helps improve my self-confidence" (Chi Square=6.813). Of the total respondents, 73.1% of students who are enrolled in the program with the reason- to improve their social staus perceived that the program helped improve their self-confidence while only 59.9% of students who are enrolled in the program without such a reason perceived that the program helped improve their self-confidence. In short, the student who attends the program with the intention to improve his social status also gain more self-confidence than the student who attends the program without such an intention.

Table 15: The Relationship Between "to Improve Social Status" and "Improve Self-confidence" of STOU Students.

		Improve Self-confidence		
		No	Yes	Row Total
Improve Social Status	No (N)	87	130	217
	(%)	40.1	59.9	55.9
	Yes (N)	46	125	171
	(%)	26.9	73.1	44.1
	Total(N)	133	255	388
	(%)	34.3	65.7	100.00

Chi Square = 6.81340

df = 1

Significance = 0.00090

Table 16 shows that there is a significant relationship at the level beyond 0.001 between the reason for attending the program- "to get a degree" and the perceived value of the distance learning program- "the program helps improve my self-confidence" (Chi Square =12.273). Of the total students who attended the program with the intention to get a degree, 76.9% perceived that the program helped improve their self-confidence while only 59.9% of students who attended the program without such a reason perceived that the program helped improve their self-confidence. In short, the student who attended the program with the intention to get the degree improved her self-confidence more than the student who attended the program without such an intention.

Table 16: The Relationship Between "to Get a Degree" and "Self-confidence" of STOU Students.

		Increase Self-confidence		
		No	Yes	Row Total
To Get a Degree	No (N)	99	142	241
	(%)	41.1	58.9	62.1
	Yes (N)	34	113	147
	(%)	23.1	76.9	37.9
	Total (N)	133	255	388
	(%)	34.3	65.7	100.00

Chi Square = 12.27358

df = 1

Significance = 0.0005

Table 17 shows that there was a significant relationship at level beyond the 0.05 level of confidence between the reason for attending the STOU program- "to get a degree" and the perceived value of the program- "I gained negative experience from the STOU".(Chi Square =5.884). Of the total sample, 12.9% of the students who attended the program with the intention to get a degree perceived that they gained negative experiences from the STOU while only 5.4% of the students who attended the program without such an intention perceived that they gained negative experience from the STOU. In short, the student who attended the program with the intention to get a degree was more disappointed with the program than the student who attended the program without such an intention.

Table 17: The Relationship Between "to Get a Degree" and "Negative Experience" at STOU.

		Gain Negative Experience		
		No	Yes	Row Total
To Get a Degree	No (N)	228	13	241
	(%)	94.6	5.4	62.1
	Yes (N)	128	19	147
	(%)	78.1	12.9	37.9
	Total(N)	356	32	388
	(%)	91.7	8.3	100.00

Chi Square = 5.8843

df = 1

Significance = 0.0153

2. The Relationship Between Personal Variables and the Level of Satisfaction of the Program. The researcher found no statistical significant relationship between personal variables of STOU students and their satisfaction with the program.

3. The Relationship Between Personal Variables and Students' Difficulties in Studying at STOU. Table 18 (page 139) shows that there is a significant relationship at level 0.001 or lower between the faculty the students are enrolled in and the difficulties in studying (Chi square = 26.051). For instance, 22.5% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of management science perceived that work pressures caused a lot of difficulties while only 11.5% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of education did so. With respect to financial problems, 13.1% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of education perceived that they had financial problems while only 3,4% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of management science had financial problems. In addition, 28.7% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of management science perceived that they had had enough time for studying while 20.9% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of education perceived that they had such difficulties. On the contrary, 20.8% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of management science perceived that they had difficulties in

contacting the tutor, while a similar proportion, 18.3%, of students who were enrolled with the faculty of education perceived that they had such difficulties. Similarly, 13.1% and 10.1% of students who were enrolled with the faculty of education and the faculty of management science, respectively, perceived that they had difficulties concerning their self-discipline.

In summary, education students encountered more difficulties in the areas of demanding of the course, domestic interruption, lack of contact with other students, and self-discipline than management science students did. Conversely, management science students encountered more difficulties in the areas of work pressure, lack of contact with the tutor, and lack of time than education students did. The largest group of students in both faculties perceived that the lack of time was the most difficult factor to deal with in the study at STOU. The smallest group of students in the two faculties perceived that lack of contact with other students was the most difficult factor to deal with.

Table 18: The Relationship Between Personal Variables and Students' Difficulties in Studying at STOU

Faculty \ Item		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Raw Total
Education	N	17	22	10	35	8	40	25	25	9	191
	%	8.9	11.5	5.2	18.3	4.2	20.9	13.1	13.1	4.7	51.8
Management Science	N	10	40	5	37	2	51	6	18	9	178
	%	5.6	22.5	2.8	20.8	1.1	28.7	3.4	10.1	5.1	48.2

Chi Square = 26.05148
df = 8
Significance = 0.001

Note: 1 = course is too difficult to understand
2 = work pressure
3 = domestic interruption
4 = lack of personal contact with tutor
5 = lack of personal contact with other students
6 = lack of time
7 = financial problems
8 = self-discipline
9 = other difficulties

FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The Value of The Distance Learning Program. Students, except the dropouts, perceived that the STOU program was very useful to them. Informants who resided in either Bangkok or Nakornsawan ascertained that the program was useful to their present job and their day-to-day living. Details of the value of the program to students follow.

a) The Value of the Program to Students' Day-to-Day Living. Most informants say that the STOU program brought hope and reality to their family life. The program made them feel that they live in the world with hope and that they are equal to others. The passing of each course brings a lot of confidence to them. They feel that they can learn as others can. The more efforts they put in the greater success they receive. Suteep's explanation should better illustrate values of the STOU program to day to day living.

> The STOU makes me feel that I can learn. I have gained more confidence since the time I was enrolled in this university. I am enthusiastic to work. I myself feel that my life becomes more meaningful and that I am encouraged to discuss with colleagues. In addition, knowledge received is applicable to my day to day living.

Similar to Suteep's, Tong-yoo said that knowledge received from the STOU program made her gain more confidence. She was encouraged to participate in the staff meeting. More importantly, the program helped her improve

relations between herself and her husband and children. She was encouraged to exchange ideas with her husband and to answer her children's questions before her husband since she realized that she could find reasons to back up her answers. Lastly, the STOU program made Tong-yoo love reading and consequently she knew how to use her leisure time wisely.

On the contrary, dropouts feel that the STOU program was useless for their day-to-day living. The program puts too much pressures and builds negative attitudes on them. Jirawan's explanation should illustrate this feeling.

> The program was too burdensome for me. In the past I used to be an easy-going person. I did whatever I wanted to do. After being enrolled in the program, I hated to do house keeping which was supposed to be my responsibility. Especially, prior to the final exam week I felt mad every time that I was asked to do an extra job at my school. I became a touchy, moody, and worrying person.

2. The Value of the Program to Students' Present Jobs. Most informants, both dropout and non-dropout, perceived that the STOU program was useful to their job. Very few dropouts criticized the program as not being related to what they were doing. Some dropouts claimed that the program became more useful to their present job after they shifted their goal of study from learning for passing the exam to learning for application. Silapachai's explanation should better illustrate the usefulness of the program to students' present jobs.

> When I was enrolled in the program, I had no time to watch or to listen to the TV and the radio (of the STOU) program. I spent all my spare time reading texts and preparing myself for the exam. Passing the exam was so important for me. Now I quit the program. I find that the program was very useful. Many times I borrowed a text from my friend who is still in the program. I read it, and read only the section which is related to my job. I do not need to worry about the exam. I have more time to think about and to apply it. Nowadays, I watch every STOU TV program and I find it very useful to me. Especially the program on child care, nutrition, and other education-related programs.

Perceived differently, Jirawan who was teaching accounting but was enrolled in the education program and specialized in teaching of Thai language explained that the program was not directly useful to her teaching job therefore she quit the program. However, Jirawan did mention that some educational courses, e.g., Educational Psychology and Evaluation in Education are applicable to her present job. She better understands her students and many times she gave advice to her friends who had no education backgrounds.

The non-dropout students valued the STOU program highly. Most non-dropout informants perceived that the program was useful to their present job. Especially, informants who were teachers were able to apply what they learned to their teaching job. With regard to this matter, Suteep explained:

> The study at STOU broadens my experience. I have opportunities to apply what I learned. For example, I took a summer school course which required students to produce a learning package. I produced a learning package and gave it to the school library. My colleagues were interested in the package. They borrowed the text from me and asked me to explain how to make a learning package to them.

Similar to Suteep's perception, Suchat who was enrolled in the management science program asserted that the program was very useful to his present job when he stated:

> With respect to my present job, the program is very useful. I applied what I learned to my present job. Especially in the area of field work supervision and job design, the knowledge I learned is very applicable and productive. In the past, I only received an order from the superior and enforced it. Now I only request for the policy then implement it with confidence.

3. The Value of the Program to Students' Social Status. Most informants, except the dropouts, perceived that being an STOU student helped improve their social status. Surajit who is a business man and quit the program explained that as a business man everyone in Nakornsawan knew him and he gained considerable recognition from the public. He earned about CDN$ 100-200 every day. His friends regarded him as a wealthy man. Similarly, Silapachai who held a bachelor degree in engineering from Chulalongkorn University and quit the program explained that the program did not help improve his social status. As a graduate of Chulalongkorn University, he was already highly regarded by friends, colleagues, and subordinates. Therefore both did not perceive the value of the STOU

program as a means which could help them improve their social status. However, those who did not hold any degree and were not already regarded by the public believed that the STOU degree helped improve their social status. Mant explained:

> I study for the degree. I know Thai people regard the degree holder higher than the one who does not have it. I know someone regards the degree from Chulalongkorn or Prasanmitr higher than the degree from STOU. Therefore I quit this program when I was admitted to Prasanmitr.

Further, most non-dropout informants believed that the STOU degree could help improve their social status. Their parents would be proud of them. They would get acceptance from their friends or colleagues. Chalermchai explains that:

> My wife held a bachelor degree. I have only a teachers' college diploma. I feel uncomfortable to go attending social activities with her. Importantly, her cousins and relatives look down upon me.

Lastly, the researcher also found that the perception toward the value of the program in improving one's social status of students who attended the tutoring session was different from the students who never attend the tutoring session. Wilai who never attended the tutoring explained that the program did not help her have more friends while Winai argued that the program helped him meet people in different ages and occupations. He had opportunities to exchange ideas with people in other occupations thus

broadening his social boundary.

The Degree of Student Satisfaction With the Program. The degree of student satisfaction with the STOU programs was mixed. Most informants were satisfied with some aspects of the program. For instance, most informants are satisfied with the course syllabus, program structure, admission policy, instructional system, and textbooks. They reasoned that the open-admission policy adopted by the university offered opportunities and hope to them to pursue their postsecondary educational level. The program structure which enabled students to attain the degree in two years or more made their struggle become more realistic. The course syllabus was structured, thorough, and well designed. The employed and/or the married students were able to and encouraged to register with the university since they were not required to attend classes.

However, some students were dissatisfied with the program. They claimed that the number of courses available was very limited and also a number of informants found that the options offered within the program were inadequate. Winai further explained that "I will be happier if the university offered more options". The open-admission policy was viewed by an informant with some degree of opposition. She believed that there should be higher standards of admission which should be to some extent selective regarding

whom to be admitted in the program. Nevertheless, such standards should not restrict admission to a specific number of students for admission as in the case of conventional university admission quota. Mant argued "I am not proud of being an STOU student, everyone can be an STOU student". Another aspect that caused dissatisfaction for most informants is the delay in communication between students and the university. They spent too much time waiting for textbooks to come at the beginning of the session and for the result of the final exam. Even worse, information received by mail was often ambiguous and misleading.

The Relationship Between Personal Variables and Students' Perceptions. Students' perceptions which were related to personal and social variables and which were to be presented under this heading include: (a) the perceived value of distance learning programs, (b) the degree of student's satisfaction with the program, and (c) difficulties in studying at STOU.

a) The relationship between personal variables and perceived value of distance learning programs. Most informants perceived that these two personal variables affected their perceptions: (1) occupation and (2) personal reasons for attending the STOU. Informants who perceived that the program was related to their occupation valued the program they were enrolled in. On the contrary, informants

who did not perceive any relevance between the program and their occupation did not value the program. For instance, Suteep and Suchat, who both are teachers, noted that they could apply knowledge gained to their present job. The program helped improve their performance. In addition, they received warmer acceptance from their superiors and colleagues. Surajit, who was a businessman and was enrolled in the management science program, contended that the program was less useful to him when he asserted:

> At the beginning, I was very glad when I heard that I was eligible to seek an admission from the STOU. I was not reluctant to request admission. I thought the program would contribute a lot to my job. However, after being enrolled in the program, I was so busy. I had to supervise the construction company and the wood store that I own. I had only seven days to prepare for the exam so that I failed.... I feel that I need to devote more time to my business. I do not think the program can help me.... Further, my mother used to suggested that I earn my living rather than studying.

Personal reasons for attending the STOU was another variable that affected students' perceived value of the STOU program. The informant who wished to get the degree valued the program higher than the informant who was enrolled in the program without such a reason. For instance, the informants who related the degree to job and social mobility valued the program more highly than the one who was enrolled in the program with the reason only to get the degree. Most informants believed that the degree helped improve their social status thus motivated them to devote more time and

efforts to their study. Thus, the degree made them eager to learn, and as a consequence they value the program highly.

In addition to these two personal variables, the researcher also found that encouragement from family members such as spouse, children, parents, and cousins was another variable that affected perceived values of distance learning programs of STOU students. The informant who came from the family whose members value the degree highly tended to value the program higher than the one who came from the family whose members did not place as much value on having a degree. For example, if parents of the informant consider having a degree as highly significant then the informant would more likely value STOU program. Conversely the informant whose family members did not regard the degree as important would be discouraged and unmotivated to learn therefore she placed a lesser value on the program.

b) **The relationship between personal variables and the degree of students' satisfaction with the program.** There are two personal variables affecting the degree of satisfaction with the program: (1) informants' occupation and (2) the reason for attending the STOU. Most informants asserted that they were satisfied with the program which was applicable to their present job or helped facilitate their job mobility. For instance, Suteep asserted that:

> I am satisfied with the program. I feel that the program helps improve my self-confidence. The knowledge gained is applicable to my present job. I am accepted, academically and socially, among my colleagues and superior.

The reason for attending the STOU indirectly helps increase the degree of student's satisfaction. The informant who attended the program with reasons (i.e. for a degree, to increase social status, to increase job mobility) put more effort into the program thus profited more from the STOU. As a result, such an informant tended to be more satisfied with the program. On the contrary, the informant who attended STOU without reason tended to put less efforts into her study thus learn less. She was consequently dissatisfied with the program.

In the interview, the researcher also found that satisfaction with the program was directly related to the value of the program. The informant who valued the program highly was more satisfied with the program while the opposite holds for the informant who valued the program less.

c) The relationship between personal variables and difficulties in studying at STOU. Perceived difficulties in studying at STOU are related to these six personal variables: (1) occupation, (2) income, (3) the average hours of working, (4) financial support, (5) years at STOU, and (6) reasons for attending the STOU. The informant who is a

public enterprise employee gained more income than the informant who is a government employee thus he had less difficulties concerning financial support. In addition, most informants who are public enterprise employees were engaged in overtime jobs thus had less hours to put into their study than government employees did. However, both groups had problems more or less concerning lack of time, lack of motivation, financial supports, and self-discipline.

With regard to years of study, the first-year informant had more difficulties concerning self-discipline than the second-year informant did. It would appear that the second-year informant had familiarized with the distance learning system thus had less difficulties. The second-year informant knew how to control herself and has higher motivation since she already completed some courses.

The reason for attending the STOU is another personal variable that is indirectly related to difficulties in studying at STOU. The informants who perceived the relationship between goals of the study and means to achieve goals tended to be able to overcome difficulties arising through the study. They had high motivation and were more self-disciplined.

Further, the researcher found that some difficulties in studying at STOU encountered by most informants were also created by the university. The delay in delivering of

textbooks, the quality of TV and radio programs, the unavailability of tutors, the lack of information about counselling services, and the lack of feedback from the tutors caused a lot of difficulties in studying at STOU. Some informants revealed that their poor academic bacground was another factor that made the study at STOU become more difficult.

SECTION IV: STUDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF STOU PROGRAMS

Respondents were asked to propose suggestions for the improvement of STOU programs. A respondent could propose more than one suggestion. Table 19 shows that 56.2% of the total respondents wanted the university to increase tutor contact and accessibility. Next below the increase of tutor accessibility, 46.9% of the respondents wanted the university to increase counselling services while 30.9% wanted the university to improve the organization of the courses. Among six choices provided, respondents ranked "improve the student assessment procedure" as the lowest priority.

Table 19: Students' Suggestions for the Improvement of STOU Programs*.

Items	Frequency	%
Increase tutor contact and accessibility	218	56.2
Improve counselling services	182	46.9
Improve the organization of the course	120	30.9
Increase opportunities for group meeting	106	27.3
Make learning center more accessible	95	24.5
Improve assessment procedure	67	17.3
Other**	48	12.4

* Respondents could choose more than one item.

** Other includes improvement in the areas of instructional media delivery, quality of tutors, broadcasting time.

The foregoing suggestions were derived from questionnaire data. Through the interviews, some suggestions for improvement were proposed. Most informants want the university to improve quality and accessibility of the tutorial session. Jirawan suggested that:

> The university should hire a permanent tutor for each tutorial center. The present tutoring which lasts three hours is not sufficient for students to ask questions. Further, I many times had questions to ask the tutor but could not locate him, finally I forget what I want to ask.

Suteep is another informant who wants to see improvement of the tutoring service when she asserts:

> I want to have the STOU staff provide tutoring services to its students. In the past, I had a lot of questions. I asked the tutor but he could not make me clear about them. If possible, I want to see the STOU staff visiting the tutoring center two weeks prior to the final exam week so that students shall make themselves clear. Along with the tutoring, I want the university to organize seminars for its students so that they can get acquainted with each other.

Some informants suggested that the university should increase the frequency of tutoring. Sai-fon suggested that:

> The university should try to find means to improve relations between the university itself and its students. Students should have more opportunities to talk or to meet with STOU staff. The means to improve this relation is to increase the frequency of tutoring. Students will have a feeling of being part of the university.

Next to the tutoring service, most informants wanted the university to improve its counselling services. Many informants sought the counselling service but they could not receive it. Jirawan suggested that:

> I want the university to provide counselling services to its students. I used to have the problem concerning the change in program and registration and wanted a counsel. But I cound not find one.

Further, some informants suggested that the university should revise its textbooks occasionally. Wilai suggested

that:

> Textbooks are a key element of the distance learning system. I found some awkwardness and ambiguity in the text. I had hard time to understand some STOU textbooks. If possible, the textbook should be revised every three years.

In addition to the suggestions mentioned, some informants were concerned with the quality of the STOU program. Mant suggested that the university should work constantly to improve its program so that the quality of its graduates shall be comparable to graduates of other universities. Similarly, Silapachai suggested that the university should try to find means to improve the quality of students' experience. The quality of experience provided by the STOU needs to be comparable with the quality of experience provided by conventional universities.

To increase interactions between students, Wirot suggested that the STOU should found an association for its students. This could be in the form of the STOU student association or whatsoever appropriate. Wirot futher explained that the association should facilitate interactions between students and in some cases the more competent student shall assist the inferior one.

Suggestions provided by questionnaire respondents and interview informants are limited. Many perceived problems and difficulties in studying at STOU but did not know how to solve problems or minimize difficulties. When they were

asked about suggestions for improvement, some were reluctant to provide suggestions.

SUMMARY

The researcher found that most STOU students used textbooks as a main medium in studying at STOU. Many used audiocassettes as a supplementary. Other instructional media such as radio programs, TV programs, and tutorial sessions were used only occasionally. Students reasoned that they did not have enough time to study from all learning media provided by the university and that they used textbooks and audiocassettes because these two types of media were more related to final exam questions. Further, the audiocassette was used to the extent that such an audiocassette was related to the textbook.

When being asked about contributions and hindrances of media and experiences to learning, 96.3% of students perceived that textbooks were a great contributor to their learning. Their perceptions concerning the contribution of radio programs, TV programs, and tutorial sessions were mixed. The students who used these media occasionally explained that the use of these media shortened their study time and, as a result, affected their performance on the final exam. The students who used these media regularly explained that these media contributed considerably to their

learning. Most students cited the following as hindrances to their learning: the delay in delivering of instructional media, the delay in the remittance of the final exam result, the vagueness and ambiguity of postal communication, the inexperience of tutors, the unavailability of tutorial center's counselor, and the lack of tutor feedback. Some students encountered personal hindrances, e.g., work pressures, personal exhaustion, financial problems, lack of motivation, lack of self-discipline, and the inexperience in learning in this system.

Students' perceptions are related to individuals' occupation and goals. If the experience gained from the program is related to the student's occupation, the student tends to value the program highly and is more satisfied with the program. In addition, the student who is able to relate benefits of the program to his goals is more satisfied with the program. Lastly, perceived difficulties in studying at the STOU are related to these personal variables: income of students, the average number of working hours, years at the university, and reasons for attending the STOU. Students with financial difficulties are often forced to take over-time jobs in order to support themselves. These added responsibilities reduce study time. The second year student has less motivation and self-discipline problems than the first year student. The student who attends the university

with some certain goals or objectives has less difficulties in studying at STOU.

Most students want to see improvements in the area of tutoring, counselling services, textbooks, and student interactions. They suggest that the university increase the frequency of tutoring and to hire a permanent tutor for each tutoring center. Students suggest that the university improve its counselling services. Information which helps students gain access to counselling services should be thorough and available. Some units of the textbook should be revised. The textbook and other instructional media should be delivered to students in time. Some students suggest that the university should organize or initiate activities which initiate student interactions. Others want to get feedback from the tutor after writing the final exam.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The discussion of findings and conclusions included in this chapter covers the following:

1. How students experience distance learning programs;
2. How students perceive some aspects of the experience as contributing to or hindering their learning;
3. The relationship between students' perceptions and personal and social circumstances; and
4. The students' suggestions for the improvement of distance learning programs.

HOW STUDENTS EXPERIENCE DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS

As presented in chapter IV, students preferred studying from textbooks to any other instructional media. TV programs, radio programs, tutoring, and audiotapes were not used to their highest potential. Most students reasoned that the textbook was the most useful medium to help them pass the final exam. If they understood and memorized what the textbook said, they believed they would easily pass the exam. They felt they did not need to waste their time watching or listening to the university TV or radio programs or attending the tutorial sessions. The audiotape would be

unnecessary if they could understand and memorize course content appearing in the text.

The use of the text book as main medium is congruent with Baath's findings in his investigation of instructional media employed by most distance teaching universities around the world. It should be explained that the textbook is a chief and accessible medium; and importantly, students can pace themselves according to their own ability.

In addition, the researcher found that STOU students preferred textbooks over the other media. This finding contradicts Robert Lefrance's findings that most students in French University Distance Education System liked a balanced media mix consisting of radio broadcasts, TV broadcasts, audiocassettes, books, and mimeographed materials. The contradiction may be explained by the fact that the student learning patterns of these two institutions were different, that the quality of media employed by the two institutions was different, that the degree of accessibility to other media experienced by students of these two institutions was different, and/or that the reasons for attending the program were different.

Some consideration should be directed to students who registered in the program for the degree. These students studied to pass the exam. Many paid attention to topics which were more likely to be asked in the final examination.

They spent the least possible time studying. Some spent only two to four weeks to complete their studies for the whole course, whereas in fact the student handbook suggests that students spend at least twelve hours per week in the period of fifteen weeks to complete a course. In writing the multiple choice examination, these students would use the guessing method for items of which they were unsure. For some students, the degree was partly a matter of luck. They did not feel it was necessary to study the course content thoroughly in order to pass the examination. This could jeopardize their academic growth. In addition, the university's goals which are to enrich knowledge and to improve the professional competency of learners would hardly be achieved. Importantly, the unqualified graduate may jeopardize the reputation and dignity of other qualified graduates. The "degree" which is the highest aspiration of most STOU students would be depreciated, and finally become meaningless. The researcher understood that most serious students as well as the STOU did not want to see the unqualified students passing the final exam just because of luck.

The findings in chapter IV indicate that most students assimilated materials through rote memorization, because the instructional and evaluation systems employed by STOU forced students to learn in this manner. Students had to learn

from textbooks and had few chances to discuss with their tutors or their peers. Consequently, they had to interpret the text by themselves. In some cases students were not able to locate knowledgeable persons in their community with which to hold discussions. However, this was the exception rather than the rule.

To pass the multiple choice examination, they had to go through the textbook. It might not be necessary for them to understand the subject in depth since the basic understanding of the subject in general might already have been sufficient for them to pass the exam. If the student failed, a supplemental test was available. Unfortunately, no provision was made to provide feedback to students on their exercises or tests. As a result, the student had no idea what material they had successfully mastered or what they had misunderstood.

Because of these instructional roadblocks, study at STOU is different from that carried in conventional universities. In the latter case, students have opportunities to discuss with their peers and their professors. Students might carry on more detailed study through the preparation of assignments, term-papers, or projects, all under the supervision of the professor.

Because the learning experience provided in a conventional university setting are broader in scope, the

overall evaluation criteria evolving from such a milieu reflect a variety of elements in keeping with the course content. For the student in this environment, merely skimming the textbook would not necessarily ensure a passing grade in the course.

Although some of the learning experiences of STOU students might be considered inferior, this learning system contributes a great deal to Thai society. For instance, experts in various disciplines were encouraged to produce textbooks for individual learning. Moreover, the existence of STOU helps to increase accessibility to the entire body of knowledge for the Thai people. In the past, people outside universities had no means to gain access to the body of knowledge. Few textbooks were available, and conventional university students learned through the lecture format. Thus STOU provides Thai people with the opportunity to improve themselves and realize their potential.

HOW STUDENTS PERCEIVE SOME ASPECTS OF THE EXPERIENCE AS CONTRIBUTING TO OR HINDERING THEIR LEARNING

Students perceive that most experiences gained from the university were more or less valuable, and contributive to their learning. Only some perceived that some instructional media were hindering their learning. In this discussion, the researcher focuses on elements of some major

instructional media and experiences which may facilitate or impede students' learning. These instructional media and experiences include textbooks, audiocassettes, TV programs, radio programs, tutorial sessions, counselling services, university-student communication, and student evaluation.

Textbooks. Most STOU students perceived that the textbook is the most valuable medium to their learning. The STOU textbook contains lesson plans, basic concepts of the subject, learning objectives, unit exercises, illustrations, pre-test and post-test. Most STOU textbooks are co-authored. Each author writes not more than three units of the fifteen units of the course so that he has enough time to work on the quality of the textbook. After being written, the fifteen units are put together. Some negative comments were received about texts. Often the unit of the textbook overlapped each other. Sometimes the authors used different vocabularies to represent the same thing. This confused the students. The researcher perceives that the textbook would confuse students less if it were edited carefully.

Another problem arising through the use of textbooks is the poor preparation and organization of exercises, pre-tests, and post-tests. The exercises followed a multiple choice format and the key to each exercise was provided on the same page just under the exercise. Students

were reluctant to think when they did the exercise, preferring instead to use the key to the exercise. In this sense, the exercise was not used as a tool to stimulate the ideas of students but instead it limited ideas and thinking of students. It is possible that some students only memorized the exercises and keys to the exercise when they prepare for the final examination, which jeopardized academic advancement. Even worse, students who were serious about learning detected some errors in keys to the exercises (possibly due to typographical errors). The keys provided did not correspond with the content presented in the textbook. When this problem arose, students became confused. They needed clarification from the tutor. However the tutor came only once a month and had only three hours for tutoring or answering students' questions. Thus not all confusions would be clarified.

With regard to pre-tests and post-tests, students complained that there was no difference between pre-tests and post-tests and that the pre-test and post-test questions were similar to or in some cases the same as the unit exercise. It is possible that the student who learned only for the degree worked only on these three exercises in preparing for the final examination. In this sense the pre-test and the post-test were considered as a tool limiting reflective ideas or thinking of students. In

reviewing the pre-test and post-test questions, the researcher found that most questions were focused on memorization rather than reflection or understanding. The pre-test and post-test would not then be considered as a facilitator of student academic advancement.

In summary, the researcher found that the textbook was perceived as the most valuable tool to student learning. It allowed students to study on their own. The STOU textbooks were accurate, up to date, readable, and applicable. STOU students who used textbooks by following the STOU's advice accompanying by other media should have been able to obtain sufficient knowledge for their final exam and for their job performance. Consequently, they should become more productive employees of their present organizations and become more productive and efficient citizens of the nation.

TV and Radio Programs. Students who watched or listened to the programs regularly perceived that the programs contributed somewhat to their learning. But students who watched or listened to the programs only occasionally perceived that the programs contributed slightly or impeded their learning. The latter group of students reasoned that contents of the programs were only slightly related to the final examination, the quality of picture and sound was poor, the broadcasting time was inconvenient for students,

and the presentation was uninteresting. In fact, through the review of related literature, the researcher found that these two types of media could be useful in many ways. For instance, they could promote active learning and motivate students. The programs bring in experts in different disciplines to present ideas and contemporary knowledge in such disciplines to students. In short, both the radio and TV programs could broaden students' perceptions in all disciplines, if the university could eliminate or minimize the weakness of its use of these media.

Lastly, the researcher realizes that the university invests a lot of money in introducing these types of instructional media into its operation. If the radio and TV programs are not produced and used properly, the university will waste a lot of money.

Tutorial Sessions. The STOU offered a three-hour tutoring session per month per course to students. The tutoring provided was intended to help students to better understand course content presented in the textbook. Ideally, students were supposed to finish reading some particular units and to prepare discussion topics before attending the tutorial session. Most distance teaching universities expect the tutor to be an expert in their discipline and at the same time be ready to act as a good teacher, administrator, counsellor, facilitator, motivator,

and record keeper. In practice, the university found it difficult to locate the ideal tutor. Most tutors hired by the university were experts in their discipline but rarely understood the nature and potential of distance learners. For instance, some tutors tried to distribute knowledge and/or specific course content as much as possible to students in their three-hour tutoring period. Thus students had no opportunities to discuss or clarify the problems which concerned them. Some tutors summarized units in the textbook for students, which was unnecessary since most students had already done that on their own or they would listen to such a summarization from the radio program. Some had no time for preparation; therefore they simply read the textbook to students in the tutorial session. Only a few acted as good tutors. They prepared themselves before giving a tutoring session. They motivated and encouraged students to learn. They provided advice which was useful for students in writing the final exam. This latter group of tutors gained respect from students.

Along with the difficulty of locating ideal tutors, the tutoring time allocated (three hours per course per month) was insufficient. Students wanted more tutoring hours. Many students reasoned that with such a limited time, they could hardly get acquainted with the tutor, and the tutor himself could hardly prove himself as a good counsellor,

motivator, or whatsoever besides being a knowledge distributor. Many students were dissatisfied with the tutoring they received.

These findings appeared to support Baath's findings which revealed that tutoring provided by the part-time staff was poor in quality. It also supports the findings of Glatter and Weddell who found that most OU tutors failed to create personal contact with and did not provide supporting comments to students, and thus lowered students' achievement. In addition, although there are several types of tutoring that can be used by OU, STOU used only the local tutorial service which is limited to lecturing. A very limited amount of group discussion could take place. The self-help group or peer tutoring was not provided. This may be explained by the fact that the university was too new to perform all of its duties adequately, that the university did not have sufficient funds to provide other types of tutoring, or that the university was not ready to train part-time staff to be effective tutors.

Further, many STOU students did not understand the purpose of the tutoring session. Many attended the sessions without preparing in advance topics which concerned them. Some only wanted to have the tutor tell them what would be asked on the final exam. Because some did not prepare themselves before attending the tutoring sessions the

tutoring became less productive.

Counselling Services. As compared to counselling services provided by distance teaching universities in other countries, the STOU's counselling service was considered inferior. In advanced technological societies, the distance teaching university has introduced technological advancement into its counselling services. For instance, students of Athabasca University can gain access to the university counselling service through the computer. With the advancement of telephone service, the student of this university can easily get in touch in person with staff of the university. They have very few problems concerning accessibility to counselling services.

At STOU, the counselling service was provided through radio programs, TV programs, the university newsletter, the university pamphlet, and the postal and telephone service. Of these six types of counselling service, only postal and telephone services were means designed specifically for this purpose. The radio program only disseminated general information to students, and so did the TV program, the newsletter, and the pamphlet. These media could not facilitate two-way communication.

With regard to mailing, students had to wait for a long time to get a response from the university. It was also possible that the response received did not clarify the

student's concern. Therefore the use of the post was not considered as an effective counselling tool. The telephone was a more effective tool as compared with mailing. However, the university arranged only one line for its over one hundred thousand students who might wish to seek advice or counsel in all matters from the university. This was considered insufficient.

In addition, the researcher found that STOU's tutors were assigned to perform tutorial duties only, but that this did not include counselling and record keeping duties. This operation is in contrast to most OUs' operation, Athabasca University for example (Cochran and Meech:1982). Athabasca University's tutors were assigned to be responsible for a certain number of students. Students who faced learning difficulties or personal problems could direct their concerns to their respective tutors, whereas STOU students had to solve problems themselves.

As mentioned earlier, STOU students were disadvantaged in many ways. The average academic standing of STOU students was poorer than that of conventional university students. STOU students might have more difficulties in understanding course content and in dealing with personal problems, which is sufficient to justify the claim that STOU students need more counselling services than conventional university students do. The STOU program would be more

viable if the STOU could find improved means of serving the interests of students who seek counselling services from the university.

University-Student Communication. Students had difficulties in communicating with the university. They did not know which campus they should contact in case they needed some assistance since the university itself consists of five campuses located in different areas of Bangkok, each being responsible for different duties. In addition to difficulties in contacting the university, most students wished to have more time to make direct contact with their tutor. They wanted the tutor to come to meet with them in a smaller group. They wanted to have more time to associate with the tutor or even to associate with one another. They wanted to establish face-to-face contact with their professor (the author of the textbook).

These findings seemed to agree with the findings of Baath that face-to-face contact between the tutor and the student was the best means of maintaining two-way communication in the OU system. In particular, Thai students were familiar with face-to-face communication in the context of classroom learning. They could clarify any ambiguity with their instructor on the one to one basis or in the classroom.

In addition, students wanted to share the feeling of belonging to the university with the university staff. They wanted to gain as much as possible the experience that the conventional university student gains.

Student Evaluation. According to the student handbook, the student evaluation was done in both formative and summative forms. These two types of evaluation could contribute substantially to student learning. But in practice, the evaluation of students was done summatively and was totally reliant on the multiple choice format. The "pass" or "fail" course mark was determined by the students' performance on the final examination. Although students were satisfied with this method of evaluation, the following two considerations should be taken into account. First, the multiple choice format may measure the cognitive domain of learning but with difficulty measures the skill or attitude domains. Students might study to pass the examination rather than studying for mastery. Second, the multiple choice format normally includes questions covering the broad areas of course content but rarely includes questions intended for in-depth understanding. In preparing for the final examination, some students skimmed through the textbook only, and they passed the examination. This made students devote less effort to their studying. Many did not watch or listen to the TV and radio programs which were also

valuable media simply because these two types of media contributed very little to their final exam performance. Some paid attention to the topics in the textbook which were more likely to be tested on the final exam only. Some worried too much about the exam and thus had less time to learn exactly what they wanted to learn. In this sense, the multiple choice format of evaluation was considered as an impediment to student learning.

Along with its weaknesses, the multiple choice format possesses some strengths. The multiple choice format can be used with a large group of students with great convenience. The marking of multiple choice questions can be done more quickly, more impartially, and less expensively. In addition, the submission of the final exam results may be made more quickly than that of any other format. These strengths of the multiple choice format may suit the nature and interests of the STOU, but must be weighed against the weaknesses of such a format.

The student evaluation method was an important factor that may have influenced the learning strategies of students, and consequently affected the quality of the STOU graduates. Any method of evaluation which aims at measuring a single domain of learning to the exclusion of others may lead to a deterioration rather than the enhancement of academic standards. The STOU graduate will be more highly

regarded if the STOU improves its student evaluation method in such a way as to more accurately assess other domain of learning.

In accordance with this finding, a discrepancy between intention and reality was discovered. The intention was, for example, that students would receive the instructional materials prior to the beginning of the session. However, this proved to be impossible when the university decided not to publish textbooks until it knew the exact enrollment in each course. Moreover, it was intended that the study center be equipped with audiotapes, videotapes, and other instructional materials, whereas in reality the university did not provide the center with these materials. The evaluation method previously discussed was another discrepancy between reality and the original plans.

The researcher was uncertain as to whether these contradictions were caused by intent or lack of readiness. If lack of readiness was the cause, then improvement in the STOU program and in the services it provides to students is possible. However, if the contradictions were caused by intent, the researcher would like to see the university review its original design, keeping in mind that one of the primary goals was to raise the academic qualifications of its students.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL VARIABLES AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

In discussing the relationship between personal variables and students' perceptions of the STOU distance learning programs, the researcher would like to discuss the general perceptions of students concerning the value of and satisfaction with the program and perceived difficulties in studying at the STOU.

In general, students valued the STOU program and they were satisfied with the program. The knowledge gained from the program helped to improve, to some degree, their job performance and their standard of living. However, students had some difficulties in studying at the STOU. Some difficulties were caused by students themselves while some others were caused by the university. Many students did not have enough time for studying while some others had difficulties concerning self-discipline, work pressure, and the lack of contact with other students. The university itself has not provided proper services to its students. The number of TV programs and radio programs broadcasted was very limited. The number of tutoring sessions was insufficient. Students had difficulties gaining access to their tutor.

Through the review of literature, the researcher found that personal problems, high demand of courses, and the poor

quality of tutoring were often cited as reasons for dropping out (Hammer and Smith: 1979). However, STOU paid little attention to the dropout phenomenon. The university did not maintain records of its dropouts. Data received through the interview of four dropout students indicated that the perceived value of the program was a major cause of the dropout. They felt that the STOU program was of less value to them than were other commitments. The data received were insufficient to lead the researcher to draw any conclusion on this matter. However, the dropout phenomenon was not the central focus of this study.

The researcher also found that students' perceptions were significantly related to reasons for attending the university. Students might attend the university for various reasons but the common reasons cited by most students were to get the degree, to gain prestige and respect, to have access to job promotion, and to enrich their knowledge. Among these reasons, the most important reason of most students for attending the STOU seemed to be the degree since it was found that students devoted most of their energy to trying to pass the final examination. They devoted less time to studying from instructional materials which were only slightly related to the final exam questions. There was very little evidence to support the belief that students attended the university to enrich

knowledge. Most students expected that the degree would be related to social acceptance and job promotion. They tended to forget what academic enrichment or advancement meant to them.

In pursuing the STOU program, students were unclear about their goals or probably were unable to relate their goals to their performance. They wanted to gain acceptance, recognition, and promotion but were rarely concerned about their academic qualifications. They wanted the public to recognize their degree but were not ready to exercise their full efforts or to use their full potential to get the degree. They did not have enough time for studying but sought overtime employment or registered for the maximum number of courses permitted. They studied from instructional materials which helped them pass the examination but were rarely interested in instructional materials which were provided to extend their understanding or insight. The students' and university's academic advancement can hardly be anticipated if neither the university nor its students change their perceptions or improve their practices.

Another topic that is worthy of discussion is the accreditation of the STOU degree. Students were uncertain as to whether the degree received and the knowledge gained from the STOU were equivalent to or comparable with what

might be received or gained through the conventional institution. It should be kept in mind that the STOU mandate differs from that of conventional universities. It served a different public and its central purpose was to provide educational opportunities to people who could not gain access to the conventional university or to people who did not wish to do so. Furthermore, it must be remembered that STOU students by their very nature were disadvantaged in so many ways when compared to students from conventional universities. Many were married and employed. Most were older than students of the conventional university. Most possessed poorer academic backgrounds than conventional university students did and many had already failed the university entrance examination. In addition, it might have been a little early for the public to justify the STOU program since the university had not yet turned out its first graduate. However, the university should undertake to find out its weaknesses so that it may make its programs more competitive and beneficial to its students.

STUDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS

Students were reluctant to provide suggestions for the improvement of the program. Suggestions received were concerned with counselling services, tutoring services,

student interactions, and program components which were partly discussed in the previous sections. Of these four categories of suggestions, student interaction is worthy of additional discussion.

Students wished to see more interaction among students themselves. Some suggested that the university found a STOU student association so that they could find a starting place of communication which might consequently lead to more interaction. The researcher perceives some benefits of student interactions. Student interactions could decrease student loneliness and promote academic discussions. They could help develop the feeling of attachment to the university and of familiarity with other students. Not only would interaction be useful to them in terms of facilitating academic advancement, but also it could be useful for the students' future careers. In addition, through student interactions, students might be encouraged to work cooperatively with other colleagues in maintaining and improving recognition of the STOU.

These suggestions explain that students wanted the university to offer experiences which are similar to those offered by the conventional university. They felt they needed more personal contact with the university, with their peers, and with their tutors than they currently had. In order to respond to these suggestions, it would be necessary

for STOU to change its role from an open university to a conventional university, as happened to Thammasat University. The problem thus arises as to whether or not the government should expand STOU. If we accept that people should have access to higher education, and that the government cannot provide higher education to its citizens through a conventional university, then STOU has to be expanded. Otherwise some Thai citizens would be forced to seek their higher education in foreign countries. Such an action is not beneficial to the nation, both in terms of monetary foreign exchange and in terms of the quality of the graduates of some foreign universities. Expansion of STOU would hopefully help fulfill a need for higher education and improve the quality of life of Thai citizens. Higher education increases opportunities for employment and encourages students to participate in activities leading to the improvement of society. (Verbal responses from the students' participating in the study reflected this point of view). The problem of how STOU can maximize the learning potential of its students and how it can utilize its limited resources to improve intellectual learning remains.

CONCLUSION

The researcher found that the experience students gained from the STOU was different from what they had previously gained from conventional institutions (i.e. the school, the college, or the university). STOU students needed to study on their own and to use instructional media provided by the university. Students needed to have a lot of reading and interpretation skills in order to learn and apply the course content.

Students encountered some difficulties in studying with STOU. Most of them (98.9%) were employed. Moreover, many also had family commitments. They did not, therefore, have sufficient time for studying. Initially, the intention of most students attending STOU was to enrich their knowledge. However, after facing some personal problems, such as lack of time, exhaustion from work, and family commitments, students shifted their intention to studying to pass the exam. In addition to personal problems, students were faced with the problems created by the university. Many did not receive instructional material on time (70.5%). Distance learners need to tolerate waiting for the tutor to come once a month to explain the difficult part of the course materials to them. They had to remain calm and cool while searching for ways to communicate with the university which consists of five campuses responsible for different duties.

They need to tolerate listening to the tutor in hot, small rooms with poor ventilation. They were advised to listen to or to watch low quality radio or TV programs. Their patience, calm, and coolness could make STOU students more mature than conventional university students. Conversely, it could also imply that this type of educational provision is suitable for mature adults.

Students' reactions toward each learning component were either negative or positive. In general, textbooks were perceived to be the greatest contributor to their learning. Audiotapes were perceived to be a second contributor to their learning. Other distance learning components such as radio programs, TV programs, and tutorial sessions could be considered contributors, but due to several constraints students had not used these media and services to their highest potential. Thus the contribution of these latter learning components to student learning was limited, whereas counselling and communication services were perceived as hindrances to their learning.

According to findings presented in chapter IV, most students perceived that the program was valuable to them. The student who was serious about learning would apply knowledge to his job. Many applied the knowledge gained to their day-to day living. In addition, since the distance learning system requires students to study on their own and

from textbooks, many developed good reading habits. They loved to read and to do research. They were encouraged to make decisions independently. The STOU program helped students to gain more self-confidence than they previously had. Many were encouraged to express their beliefs and ideas before their colleagues or family members. Many felt that they could contribute more to their job.

With regard to students' satisfaction with the program, findings in chapter IV indicate that the majority of students (95.3%) were satisfied. Many were content with the open-admission policy, the student assessment method, and the textbook.

The students' perceptions of the program were affected by personal and social circumstances, particularly by their goals for attending the STOU program. The goals themselves could motivate the students to put more effort into their studies. As a result, students learned more and did well on their final exam. In addition, they could apply knowledge gained to their jobs and their daily life. These circumstances made the program relevant and valuable to them. By contrast, the student who attended STOU without viable goals easily quit the program.

Regarding suggestions for improvement, most students wanted to see improvement in the areas which were directly related to their own problems. For instance, students who

did not receive instructional materials on time wanted the university to improve the instructional materials delivery system. Students who were lonely wanted to see more interaction among students and tutors. Thus, it would be possible for services provided by the university to be meaningful to some students while at the same time meaningless to others. The implications and suggestions proposed in the following chapter should give rise to some ideas that could lead to the improved operation of STOU.

Finally, at this early stage of the development of STOU and considering the tremendous demand for higher education from the Thai people, STOU sufficiently supports the government's policy of offering the Thai people the opportunities for higher education and at the same time it has fulfilled the need of the Thai people for higher education.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter consists of two sections: (1) implications for the improvement of STOU programs and (2) suggestions for further study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF ASPECTS OF STOU PROGRAMS

There are four major implications that shall be drawn from findings of this study: (1) for the improvement of services provided to STOU students, (2) for the improvement of STOU instructional media, (3) for the improvement of student evaluation, and (4) other.

Student Services. To improve the functioning of this university, the researcher suggests that the university improve the distribution of the following services to its students: (1) student orientation, (2) student seminars or workshops, (3) university-student communication, (4) counselling services, and (5) tutoring services.

1. Student Orientation. The university should provide an orientation to all new students. In the orientation, students should be told about strategies for learning in this system. For instance, students need to be self-reliant. They have to learn from textbooks, audiocassettes, radio programs, and TV programs instead of

learning from the lecturer or the professor. They need to be told about the functions of each type of medium employed by the university for learning purposes.

A student handbook should be provided at this orientation. In addition to details about the university regulations and guides to the use of the media listed above; the student handbook should include the names and addresses of students enrolled in each course in each geographical area and the name and address of the tutor who is responsible for each course. The addresses of students and the tutor could facilitate communication among students and between students and the tutor.

Further, the orientation should facilitate interactions among students and should be long enough to allow them to get to know each other. And finally, students should be advised as to how to manage their limited time. They should be given advice on how many courses they should register for in each session and how many hours they should spend on each course. The university should survey the students' need for seminar or workshop on learning strategy.

2. **Student Seminars or Workshops.** The researcher found that attending STOU for a degree is itself insufficient to induce students to work harder on their studies. Students should also be induced to attend the university for academic enrichment or advancement in

addition to the degree. In setting goals, academic enrichment should be given priority. The degree, social acceptance or job mobility should be set as second goals. STOU students should aspire to mastery of the course content but not just to pass the exam or to get the degree. After the goal is set, anything that impedes goal attainment must be eliminated. Further, the researcher found that students had no study plan and were not acquainted with this new learning system. Students need to adjust themselves to this learning system. The university should provide guidelines on setting a study plan and let the students determine their own plan. In addition, STOU should demonstrate the process of distance learning and provide a micro-unit for students to practice.

To make students realize the importance of academic enrichment or advancement and to help students develop study plans and become familiar with this system, the researcher believes that the seminar or workshop would be helpful. However, the university needs to train its staff to lead this kind of seminar.

3. **University-Student Communication.** To improve university-student communication by mail, the university should ask for the cooperation of the Thai Postal Service Organization to speed up the delivery of the university mail. At the same time it should train its staff to improve

their communication skills. The researcher suggests that the installment of more telephone lines is not beyond the university's capability. Each tutoring center should be equipped with a telephone line accessible to the students to facilitate contact among the student, university, and center. Lastly, the university should maximize opportunities for face-to-face contact between staff and students. Communication between students and the university should be more open.

4. Counselling Services.

In providing counselling services at the local study center, the university might hire a permanent counsellor and at the same time train its tutors to do this kind of work along with their regular tutoring. This would help the university save money, and might make the counselling service more effective since most students apparently trust the tutor to a greater extent than other university personnel.

5. Tutoring Services. To improve the quality of tutoring practice, some changes regarding tutor selection and preparation and time management need to be made. The university needs to select tutors who are best suited to the special nature of distance university students. This means that a needs assessment for tutor training should be pursued. It is also advised that the university extend its

tutoring frequency to facilitate student learning.

In addition to offering tutoring sessions, the tutorial center should be equipped with videotapes, audiotapes or cassettes of the TV and radio programs which have been previously broadcasted so that students who missed the broadcast might use this center to view these programs. Further, a sample or a copy of all educational materials produced by STOU should be collected at this center. The university should extend the number of tutoring hours, promote peer tutoring, and finally, the university should recruit honorary tutors of a high calibre to assist in providing advice or assistance to STOU students.

Instructional Media. To assure STOU students and the public about the quality of the program and the accreditation of the STOU degree, the researcher perceives that improvement in the following areas of the program needs to be made. These include: (1) textbooks, (2) radio and TV programs, and (3) audiocassettes.

1. Textbooks. To improve the quality of the STOU textbooks, the university should recruit an editor who is highly competent in editing. The editor must be encouraged to make decisions concerning the accuracy of the textbook. The textbook should be proofread carefully before being brought into use. Incorrect spellings and the incorrect word usage should be screened out; otherwise they mislead

students. Technical terms used should be thoroughly defined so that students who possess different academic backgrounds can understand them. In addition, each unit of the textbook should define to students the sources of knowledge, beside the text, that are provided by the university and that are accessible and beneficial to them.

With regard to exercises included in the textbook, the researcher perceives that the use of various exercise formats would be more constructive than the use of one single format, the multiple choice format.

2. **Radio and TV Programs.** The researcher recognizes the large amount of money the university has invested in producing radio and TV programs for its students. The programs should contribute considerably to student learning. Although the production of high quality programs for STOU students needs further investigation, the researcher suggests that the university provide training to its technicians and academic staff. The university should organize intensive training for the script writer, the program director, the announcer, the camera man, the floor manager, and so on. Instead of producing the TV talk show , the university might invite STOU students to come to the studio and participate in the taping of programs. This could make the program more realistic. The staff who is responsible for the production of TV and radio programs

needs to realize the connection between the content of these programs and the content included in the textbook. Contents of the program need to be designed with care. Production of TV and radio programs should be piloted in Bangkok. Furthermore, students should be advised as to what to prepare prior to the listening or watching each radio and TV program. In addition, the university should seek answers to the following questions: How shall students who have no TV and radio sets gain access to the TV and radio programs? How shall students who find it inconvenient to listen to or to watch the program at the scheduled time gain access to the TV and radio programs? How can students pace the program on their own? How can the program actually promote active learning?

3. **Audiocassettes**. The audiocassette is less useful than it might be since it is only a summary of what appears in the textbook. To make the audiocassette more valuable to student learning, this learning medium should provide explanations for difficult topics included in the text, broaden ideas and concepts of students on certain topics, and present discussion problems which induce students to search for answers themselves. It is essential to improve the audio quality of the cassettes.

Student Evaluation. The decision as to whether a student passes or fails depends totally on his performance on the final examination. The researcher suggests that the university evaluate its students more often and use various types of questions. This will make students become more active in the learning process, and evaluations will be more valid and reliable. The student will not be able to pass the exam simply by chance. In addition, the university should provide some feedback for the students' performance. The increase in the number of evaluations, the use of various types of questions, and the feedback provided for the student should promote the academic enrichment of students.

Other Implications. The researcher realizes that STOU is a postsecondary institution and is widely known among the Thai people. In addition to teaching and granting degrees to students, the researcher suggests that the university should provide more academic services to the community. Also the university might support activities that enhance its reputation and bring recognition to the university itself and its students. For instance, the university might participate in local or national activities such as parades, sports, and other community development activities.

Further, the tutorial center might provide services which facilitate student learning. These services might

include the provision of a low-cost photocopying service and the selling of writing materials and equipment at cost price. Finally, STOU should promote itself to the public as a non-profit organization rather than a profit organization. The student who withdraws from a course within the specified time should be entitled to a refund. Similarly, changes in registration within the regulation time should be permissible.

The implications mentioned earlier are intended to make STOU more effective and contributive. However, it does not mean that the present program is valueless or unproductive. The researcher realizes the great contribution of STOU to the Thai people. It offers hope and opportunities to prospective students, especially the employed, by providing job training. It creates and improves self-confidence among most STOU students. Knowledge gained from the university is useful and applicable. STOU has to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Thai nation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The researcher realizes that the idea of the distance teaching university is new to Thai people. In its operation, the university may face some problems which await solutions. In order to improve the functioning of this university, the researcher suggests that further studies in

this area be pursued. These include:

1. A study on tutors' needs assessment. The university needs to know what kinds of training are required to produce a good tutor. The university needs to know students' expectations of their tutors.
2. A research study which aims at answering the following questions should be pursued.
   a. What is the most suitable learning strategy for STOU students? How can STOU help its students develop their study skills?
   b. How can STOU radio and TV programs be made more effective? What are the characteristics of good TV or radio programs for STOU students?
   c. What do employers or the public expect from STOU graduates? How do employers or the public perceive strength or weaknesses of the STOU program?
3. There should be a follow-up study of STOU graduates.
4. A study similar to this study should be done with administrative and academic staff of this university.
5. A replication of this type of study is advisable every five years.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Student Questionnaire

Please Note: The letter of enquiry and the accompanying questionnaire have been translated from the Thai language into English. In addition the researcher has converted some items (i.e. currency) into their Canadian equivalent for ease of understanding.

Department of Secondary Education
The University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta.

May 7th, 1983.

Dear student,

This questionnaire is part of a research project undertaken for a doctoral degree in the Department of Secondary Education, The University of Alberta, Canada.

In this study I am attempting to uncover students' perception of the distance education program at STOU. I hope that the results of this study will be of benefit to everyone associated with STOU.

Your cooperation is sincerely requested in completing the attached questionnaire as carefully as possible. Your personalized responses will be of great value to the researcher.

I would request that you complete and return your questionnaire promptly to the examination supervisor.

Once again, thank you for your participation in this study.

Your Sincerely,

(Aurapan Pornsima)

Student Questionnaire

Please circle the number corresponding to your answer.

---

1 Sex Male 1

Female 2

2 Age group: Under 23 years 1

23 - 32 years 2

33 - 42 years 3

over 43 years 4

3 Present address: Nakornsawan 1

Bangkok 2

4 Highest level of Education obtained todate.

Vocational Diploma Equivalent 1

Teacher Education Diploma Equivalent 2

Vocational Diploma 3

Teacher Education Diploma 4

Others (please specify) 5

5 What is your principal occupation?

Self-employed 1

Government employee 2

Private organization employee 3

House wife 4

Unemployed 5

Others (specify) 6

6 Who gives you financial support?

Myself 1

My spouse 2

My parents 3

Relatives 4

Others (please specify) 5

7 If you are employed, what is your monthly income?

Less than $50 1

Between $51 - 100 2

Between $101 - 150 3

Between $151 - 200 4

More than $200 5

8 If you are employed, what is the average number of hour per week you work?

40 hours or less 1

41 - 50 hours 2

51 - 60 hours 3

More than 60 hours 4

9 Reasons for attending STOU (check all that apply):

To improve job opportunities 1

To improve social status 2

For personal enrichment 3

For STOU degree 4

Other (please specify) 5

10 Type of program:

Four-year program 1

Continuing two-year program 2

11 Faculty: Education Study 1

Management Science 2

12 Academic year of attendance:

1980 -1981 1

1981 2

1982 3

13 Number of courses already passed:

none 1

1-3 2

4-6 3

7-9 4

10- 12 5

13 -15 6

More than 15 7

14 What are the average hour per week you spend on your study?

5 hours or less 1

6 -10 hours 2

11 - 15 hours 3

16 - 20 hours 4

More than 20 hours 5

15 Did you receive the instructional materials on time?

Yes 1

No 2

16 Which of these do you own or have easy access to?

TV set 1

Radio set 2

Tape recorder 3

17 How accessible to you are the following elements of distance learning?

	very easy	easy	rather difficult	impossible
TV programs	1	2	3	4
Radio programs	1	2	3	4
Tutorial Session	1	2	3	4
Local Study center	1	2	3	4
Counselling Service.....	1	2	3	4

18 In this question students are asked to rank various distance learning elements on a scale of 1-6 depending on the degree of use ("1"=minimum use, "6"=maximum use).

... Study guide

... Tutorial sessions

... Television Programs

... Textbooks

... Radio programs

... Audiotapes

19 Please rate the usefulness of the following items which comprised your study.

Instructional materials

	impede	useless	useful	very useful	no idea
Textbooks	1	2	3	4	0
Study guide	1	2	3	4	0
Radio programs	1	2	3	4	0
TV programs	1	2	3	4	0
Audiotapes	1	2	3	4	0
Assignments	1	2	3	4	0
Examination	1	2	3	4	0

Services	impede	useless	useful	very useful	no idea
Tutorial services	1	2	3	4	0
Mail communication	1	2	3	4	0
Summer school	1	2	3	4	0
Program advice	1	2	3	4	0
Course advice	1	2	3	4	0

20 What additional comments do you have in relation to the above items (#19).....

.....

.....

21 How do you perceive your study experience at STOU?

No effect whatsoever..... 1

For the work I did, I learned a lot 2

It increased my self-confidence 3

I think this study experience will help me deal with some of my problems (e.g. personal, job, etc)..... 4

It was a completely negative experience 5

Other (please specify) 6

22 Are you satisfied with your program?

Very satisfied 1

Satisfied 2

Not sure 3

Unsatisfied 4

Highly unsatisfied 5

Please elaborate .....

.....

23 What difficulties did you encounter in studying with STOU? (check all that apply)

Course is too difficult to understand..... 1

Work pressure and responsibilities 2

Domestic interruption and demands 3

Lack of personal contact with tutor 4

Lack of personal contact with other students.....5

Lack of time 6

Financial problems 7

Self-discipline 8

Other (please specify) 9

24 Of the negative factors listed in question 23, please indicate which of the above caused you the <u>most difficulty</u> (please write the number you select in the blank.)(.....)

25 What could STOU do to help students meet their educational objectives?

Improve the organization of the course..... 1

Improve more opportunities for group meeting..... 2

Increase tutor contact and accessibility..... 3

Make learning centers more accessible..... 4

Improve the evaluation procedure..... 5

Increase counselling service 6

Other (plese specify)..... 7

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

PLEASE RETURN IT TO THE EXAMINATION SUPERVISOR

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

Informant	Date
1. Chalermchai	May 18, 1983
	May 27, 1983
2. Wilai	May 11, 1983
	May 23, 1983
3. Mant	May 24, 1983
	May 31, 1983
4. Winai	May 19, 1983
	May 15, 1983
	June 2, 1983
5. Aew	May 19, 1983
	May 25, 1983
6. Tong-yoo	May 17, 1983
	May 26, 2983

7. Silapachai..... May 17, 1983
June 1, 1983

8. Suteep..... May 13, 1983
May 28, 1983

9. Sai-fon..... May 14, 1983
May 28, 1983

10. Jirawan..... May 4, 1983
May 12, 1983

11. Suchart..... May 16, 1983
May 29, 1983

12. Wirot..... May 5, 1983
May 15, 1983

13. Surajit..... May 15, 1983
May 16, 1983

Appendix C

Transcription of Individual Interview

This is a transcription sample of an interview for this study. For identification purpose, "INT" is used for the interviewer and "INF" is used for the informant.

Interviewer: Aurapan Pornsima

Informant: Suteep Suksri

Date: May 13, 1983

Location: Suteep's Office (school)

After rapport between the interviewer and the informant was developed, the interviewer explained to the informant the objectives of the interview and interview procedures. The interviewer also asked for permission to tape the interview. After the permission was granted, these conversations began.

INT: What is it like to be an STOU student?

INF: I don't know how to start- I am not sure if I can help you as much as I want to do.

INT: Yes, you can. I just want to know about your experience at STOU and how you perceive the value of this experience. You may start from the very beginning at STOU.

INF: I was very happy when I first heard that STOU had been open. Do you know, I have looked forward to having a degree in education since the time I

graduated with my Teacher Education Diploma (from the teachers' college.) I could not continue my education at that time since I have brothers and sisters. My parents had to support them too. I am the oldest child of the family; therefore I had to go out teaching even though I was eager to learn. I applied for admission to the teachers' college to attend the evening program which leads to a bachelor degree but I did not get in since my work experience was less than some other colleagues. Therefore, when this opportunity came up, my husband encouraged me to attend STOU. I had to borrow emergency funds from the Provincial Teacher Cooperation in order to pay for my registration fees because I had just bought a house. In the first term, I registered for three courses. Just about two weeks before my first final exam at this university, my husband was very sick and he had to stay in the hospital to have his appendix removed. I had to look after my two children and at the same time had to take care of him at the hospital. I brought my textbooks with me while I took care of him. I finished the textbooks assigned for two courses only, and passed these two courses but failed the remaining one. I realized that I passed the exam because I had never missed

the tutoring session. I then prepared myself for the supplementary examination. I finally passed the course. This time I felt more confident and I knew that I would be able to complete my program. I also knew that to pass the exam I needed to go through the text at least once- plus a completion of exercises in the textbooks. Now I know what education for life means. I have to work very hard to pass the exam. I registered for three courses every session. I passed them all. Among these, I passed two courses with honours. I was very delighted. I attended the summer school once. Now I need to do only two more courses in order to complete the program. I will be one of the first group of STOU graduates.

INT: You are graduating very soon, how do you feel?

INF: I am very proud of myself. I know I studied on my own. I have no teacher. I can learn even though I have a family to take care of. At my school, there are ten other teachers who started their program at the same time as I did. I will be one of two who will possibly graduate at the near future. Do you know, some students had already held a degree but failed the exam since they did not have enough self-discipline.

INT: How do you develop self-discipline?

INF: I think study goals are important. We need to know what we study for. I encouraged myself all the time. I believe in a saying -"wherever there is a will, there is a way".

INT: Can you tell me how you manage your studying at home?

INF: I followed the university's suggestions. I mainly used the university textbooks. I attended the tutorial sessions regularly. I listened to all the audiotapes and watched university TV programs occasionally.

INT: Can you tell me about your experience with each STOU instructional media?

INF: Can I begin with the textbook? Is that okay?

INT: Sure.

INF: I read abstracts of the textbooks twice before reading details of each unit. I underlined main ideas of the text and took notes in a separate notebook which is provided by the university. I mostly studied between 9:00-12:00 pm., or until I felt tired. Sometimes I could not study at home because it was too noisy. In this a case, I went to bed earlier and woke up in the early morning to study- mostly around 4:00 a.m. The huge text bores

me. I put all of my effort into finishing it. Even when I visited my parents, I brought this text with me. I read it until I felt sleepy. But as soon as I woke up, I read it again. I lived with my textbook all day long. Whenever I got bored, I chatted with my husband and children for a while then I began to read again... No one can succeed if he has no real intention. I read the textbook carefully and interpreted what the author intended to say. I tried to think how I could apply this knowledge to my work.

While listening to the audiotape, I took note of what I thought was useful for studying. Whenever I had some which were useful to my husband's work, I told him to listen to the tape with me. And he helped me to turn the recorder on and off too.

INT: Can you give me an example from the audiotape that is useful to both you and your husband?

INF: My husband is perfect in most aspects except that he is not interested in taking care of the children. I told him many times to pay more attention to the children but he neglected to listen to me. When I got an audiotape about child development, I told him to listen to it. After listening, we discussed about our children. This

time it worked. Now he pays more attention to the children.

INT: This should make you happy, doesn't it?

INF: Yes, very much.

INT: Can you talk about your tutorial session experience?

INF: Yes. I attended all tutorial sessions. I occasionally raised a question in the class. Even if I did not have a question to ask, I was happy to attend the session. I could listen to the tutor and other students, which helped extend my understanding of the subject. Some tutors are good motivators.

INT: Can you tell me what kind of motivation you received from the tutor?

INF: Yes. For example, I used to think that statistics was a difficult subject. I was about to withdraw from the course. But after attending a tutorial session, I changed my mind. The tutor said in the class that statistics was a difficult subject and that only smart students could pass the exam. His statement motivated me. I wanted to be a smart student. I completed all the exercises. I talked with my husband whenever I could not understand it. Finally I passed the statistic course.

INT: How about your experience with broadcasting?

INF: I like the university TV programs and so do my husband and children. My son normally reminds me whenever the program is on.

INT: You told me at the beginning that you watched the programs occasionally. Can you give me some reasons why you do not watch every program which is related to your program?

INF: The content of the program is good, but sometimes the quality of the picture is poor. This could be caused by either the transmission system or the television set. My television set is an old one. I cannot afford a new one.

INT: How about the radio programs?

INF: I remember I tried once or twice to listen to the radio programs. The quality of sound was very poor. I never listened to it again. I think I learn enough from other media.

INT: Can you expand a bit more on what you said?

INF: I mean I have many things to do. I have a family. I am a teacher and at the same I am a student. I could not do more than this. It is already enough for me to pass the exam.

INT: Based on your experience, how do you feel about the distance learning system at STOU?

INF: I like it very much. It suits my situation.

STOU provides me with an opportunity to study without requiring me to quit my job. I can stay with the family. It is economical too. I am satified with the program.

INT: Has being an STOU student changed your life-style?

INT: Yes, there have been some changes in our life-style but not much. I have more work to do, but I do not have many problems. My children and husband understand and support me. Before attending STOU, my husband did not do household chores but now he does them, and so do my children. My children do not bother me when I study. They had a celebration every time I passed an exam.

INT: Is there any change in your social life at all?

INF: No, we are unambitious people. We are satisfied with our life style. We are busy building our economic status too. So we cannot go to parties that often.

INT: How about your job?

INF: I am encouraged in my work. I feel that the program has helped to improve my self-confidence. I can use what I learned in my present job. I am accepted, academically and socially, among my colleagues and superiors. I have good textbooks

that I can use anytime to search for more information. Before, I was not encouraged to work or to start a new project because in my school the number of teachers with degree increases every year. I felt that I am inferior as compared with others since I only had an undergraduate diploma in teacher education. In the staff meeting, I raised suggestions but they were not well regarded. Suggestions made by a junior teacher who had a degree was more recognized. This forced me to work hard for the degree.

INT: Can you give some examples of knowledge that is applicable to your present job?

INF: Sure. This is what I got from my summer school. There, I took a course which required that students produce a learning package. Because of this experience, I know how to make a learning package. The management course I took helps me better understand my principal.

INT: Is there any disadvantage in studying at a distance?

INF: Yes. Sometimes I was not sure if my interpretation of the subject is correct. Some topics were difficult and I could not understand them. I wanted to discuss these problems with the

tutor, but the tutor was not available.

INT: In this case, what did you do about your problems?

INF: Sometimes I talked with my husband and friends. And sometimes I just forgot about them.

INT: I forgot to ask you about your goals in attending STOU. Do you have something to say about them?

INF: Yes. I want to gain knowledge that can help improve my profession. Besides, I also want a degree and to be a good example to my children.

INT: In what way that you think you can be a good exemplar to your children?

INF: As you know, it is not easy to be admitted to the conventional university. Many high school graduates give up when they do not pass the entrance exam. I do not want that to happen to my children.

INT: This is going to be the final question for today. Do you think that STOU can do something that can help you achieve your educational goals?

INF: I have no idea right now. Can I tell you in the next interview?

INT: Sure. Thank you very much for your cooperation. What will be a convenient time for you for the next meeting?

INF: How about May 28th, in the morning, at my place?

INT: Yes. I had very good time today. Thank you again. See you soon.

.....

Appendix D

Account of Individual Interview

The researcher had good rapport with her informant, Mrs.Suteep. She displayed a positive attitude towards herself, her family, STOU, and the interview.

Her goals in attending STOU are to gain knowledge and a bachelor's degree which might earn her deep respect and prestige from her colleagues.

She felt that her success in studying at STOU is a result of these factors: a strong desire for a degree qualification, personal goals (appropriateness of the program), support from her husband and children, and self-discipline.

As a result of being an STOU student, there have been some changes in her daily life and working life which have affected her in a positive way. However, there have also been minor problems, which are related to both financial and time constraints. On the whole, she feels that the STOU program is valuable for her.

When asked about her views regarding learning system, she portrayed a positive attitude toward the same. She particularly enjoys the programs flexibility, independence, and self-regulation, as this allows her to live with her family. In addition, it is an economical system.

In regard to her learning activities, she tries to follow suggestions outlined in the textbook. She complements her textbook readings with listening to subject matter audiotapes and TV programs. She does the exercises and attends tutorial sessions regularly. Her only complaint was lack of contact with the tutor.

The next interview session will focus on the following issues: suggestions for improvement the STOU operation, future goals (of graduation), financial cost incurred in studying at STOU, perception of the degree and its social value, and her summer school experience.

Appendix E

Informants' Personal Profile

Residence: Bangkok

Chalermchai. Chalermchai is 32 years old. He is a second year student in the Faculty of Education. Chalermchai married and has one three-month-old son. His wife held a B.Ed. degree. Chalermchai himself held a Diploma in Education, and currently serves in the Department of Non-formal Education, the Ministry of Education. The social and work environments push Chalermchai to attend STOU for a degree.

Wilai. Wilai is 33 years old and unmarried. She is a second year student in the Faculty of Education. Wilai held a B.Ed. and M.Ed. degree from Chulalongkorn University. She comes from the high-middle class family. She initially attended STOU for academic enrichment but later on for passing the exam. She explained that she would be shameful if she failed the exam.

Mant. Mant is 23 years old and unmarried. Mant has five younger brothers and sisters and they stayed together in the same family. He graduated with a Diploma in Education from the teachers' college four years ago. His primary

goal in attending STOU is for a degree which can be used as a stepping stone for career advancement. His father discouraged him to quit the STOU program and he did so after being admitted to Srinakarin Wirot University. Mant explained that he did not learn what he expected to learn from STOU programs.

Winai and Aew. Winai and Aew married and have a seven-month-old daughter. They both came from middle-class family and worked at the Government Housing Authorities. They have their own house and a servant to help in doing household chores. A degree is the primary goal of both informants. Besides, Winai also attended STOU for academic enrichment.

Tong-yoo. Tong-yoo is a first year student in the Faculty of Management Science. She married a graduate in Architecture from the University of Philippines. Tong-yoo has two children, one is five and another one is one and a half. Tong-yoo held a Diploma in Vocational Education and was encouraged to attend STOU by her husband. Her primary goal in attending STOU is academic enrichment.

Silapachai. Silapachai is 44 years old. He held a B.Sc. in engineering from Chulalongkorn University and serves as an engineer at the Government Housing Authorities. Silapachai married and has one eight years old son. His wife is attending evening classes for a B.Ed. degree at a teachers' college. He earns about CDN$ 600 a month. He attended STOU for academic enrichment but quitt the program due to time constraints.

Residence: Nakornsawan

Suteep. Suteep is 38 years old and married with two children, one is 14 and another one is 13. Her husband held a B.Ed. from Srinakarin Wirot University. She is a kindergarten teacher. She loves studying but had to go out teaching due to financial problems. Her primary goal in attending STOU is for a degree in education. Besides, she wished to apply knowledge learned to her present job.

Sai-fon. Sai-fon is the first year student in the Faculty of Education. She is 22 years old and unmarried. Sai-fon held a Diploma in Education from a teachers' college and presently teaches at a private school in Nakornsawan. Her

goals in attending STOU are uncertain. Probably the STOU degree could help her get a better job. Sai-fon comes from a lower-middle class family.

Jirawan. Jirawan held a Diploma in Vocational Education. She is an administrative staff of a secondary school in Nakornsawan city. She married and has a four-year old son. Jirawan husband held a B.Ed. degree. Jirawan and her family live with her parents. Her primary goal in attending STOU is to get a degree. Jirawan quit the education program and waited for a transfer to the Faculty of Management Science after knowing that she was qualified to seek admission to this latter faculty. She also explained that what she learned from the education program was not relevant to her present job.

Suchat. Suchat is the second year student in the Faculty of Management Science. He is married with two children. Suchat and his family stay with his parents. He held a Diploma in Vocational Education from the technical college, and presently teaches at a technical college. His primary goal in attending STOU is for academic enrichment, and a degree is his

secondary goal.

Wirot. Wirot is the first year student in the Faculty of Management Science. He is 23 years old and unmaried. He works with a commercial bank in Nakornsawan city. Wirot and his sisters stay with their parents. He attended STOU for a degree. He also said that he could attend STOU without having to quit his job.

Surajit. Surajit is 28 years old, and he runs his own business. He married a government official and has one five months old daughter. Surajit did not have time for studying. He failed the first two courses he enrolled in, and finally quit the program. He also explained that the program was not useful for his business. He is happy with his present status, socially and economically. His family members including his parents discouraged him from pursuing the program.